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THROUGH SHOT AND FLAME

J. D. KESTELL

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THROUGH SHOT AND FLAME

THROUGH SHOT AND FLAME

THE ADVENTURES AND EXPERIENCES OF

J. D. KESTELL

CHAPLAIN TO PRESIDENT STEYN

AND

GENERAL CHRISTIAN DE WET

METHUEN & CO.

36 ESSEX STREET W.C.

LONDON

1903

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K4

TO

MY WIFE

WHO WAS ONE OF THE THOUSANDS WHO ENDURED IN THE GREAT STRUGGLE FOR FREEDOM, I DEDICATE THIS BOOK

AND

WITH HER I COMMEMORATE HERE THE FIDELITY AND PATRIOTISM OF HIM WHO WAS MY COMRADE IN THE FIELD, AND WHO DIED IN THE SPRINGTIDE OF HIS LIFE, A PRISONER OF WAR, AT LADYSMITH, NATAL

OUR SON, CHARLES KESTELL

PREFACE

THE book, which I here offer my people, passed through many vicissitudes. Solicitous for my personal safety, my wife committed the first part of it to the flames. I did not take this amiss, for I understood what the motives were which urged her to do so. Immediately after Peace was concluded, I set myself to rewrite what had been destroyed, with the result that it reappeared, but in a much condensed form. Then I lost about a third of my notes at Graspan, near Reitz, when I was a prisoner of war for seven hours. After my escape, I had sufficient time in the field to compose this portion anew, and it now exists completer than it did at first.

I have endeavoured to record facts truthfully. If I have failed to see things as they exactly were, I have at least given a truthful account of the impressions they made upon me. I have written, in the words of Montaigne, *si non à la mesure des choses, au moins à la mesure de ma vue.*

With regard to what I have said in these pages about the destruction of property and the treatment of our women and children, I have erred rather in minimising than in exaggerating the actual facts, as every eye-witness will testify.

My thanks are due to the Revs. A. J. L. Albertyn,

P. J. J. Boshoff, G. F. C. Faustmann, and Mr. A. B. Bartman for assistance rendered me in the preparation of the Minutes of the Burgher Assembly at Vereeniging, and of the Conference at Pretoria during 15th to 31st May 1902. I must also mention the name of Mr. D. E. van Velden, without whose collaboration the Minutes at the Pretoria Conference would not have been so full as they are. I intended first to publish all these minutes as an appendix to this work, but they will now appear in General de Wet's book.

General J. B. M. Hertzog, formerly Judge of the Orange Free State, has also my acknowledgments for things which he will recognise here.

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PART I.—HOPE

THROUGH SHOT AND FLAME

PART I

HOPE

CHAPTER I

I JOIN THE HARRISMITH COMMANDO

I PURPOSE to chronicle in the following pages my experiences of the war between the Boers and the English. It is my object to record what I went through on commando, and to give the reader an idea, according to my own observation, of the struggles and sufferings of a small nation against the overwhelming odds of an Empire—nay, against the world itself.

For was it not against the world that the little nation fought?

Think of it. Not only did England have 240,000 men in the field against 45,000 of the two South African Republics; not only did she have more guns than the two little States, much more ammunition, a much greater amount of supplies, a great many more horses, much more money—but she had the world also on her side. The world looked on the strife without putting forth a hand to help the weak against the strong: nay, it helped the strong. The United States of North America sold horses and wheat

and meat to the mighty Empire, that was carrying on a war of extermination against the two small States in South Africa; the Republics of South America gave mules; Austria and Russia supplied horses. I do not forget, when I say this, the large sympathy which the world showed us. I should be guilty of the most heinous ingratitude if I did not acknowledge that the world, and especially Holland, went out of its way in liberally supplying clothing and large sums of money to our women and children in the concentration camps, and to the prisoners of war on the islands. But England had the advantage of a market almost wherever she wished to buy; and she closed up every avenue through which we might have been aided. And so the little nation stood alone, while its great adversary was assisted from the four corners of the earth.

Now I purpose to put on record my experiences in this strife. I will do so as well as I can. What I have to relate, however, will by no means be a history of the war.—We shall not have a history of the war until our children write it.—No, I am not going to write a history: I am going to record my limited experiences. You will not find here, for instance, anything about the events which happened at Stormberg or Magersfontein, or about the taking of Bloemfontein or Pretoria. I was not present at those events. Only on that of which I was an eye-witness, or on what took place in the commando to which I belonged at the time, or what came to my notice shortly after its occurrence—only on that will I report in these pages.

But let me tell you before I proceed, that I accompanied the burghers only as a minister of the Dutch Reformed Church. I was never armed. I never took part in a fight as a soldier. I never meddled with military matters. All that, I felt, lay outside of my province. And yet, as will appear in

what follows, I fought in the great fight. I was often in action, and if I carried no arms, I carried a pouch of bandages. My presence in a fight gave heart to some and eased the pain of others. I fought, too, in another way: I encouraged the burghers in every service I held, just as every chaplain ought to do, and admonished them to persevere in the great fight. But I never forgot that I was a minister of religion. Every Sunday, and whenever I had an opportunity in the week, I conducted divine service, taking, as a rule, my text from the Old Testament. Besides this I devoted myself to ambulance work, without, however, ever wearing a Red Cross on my sleeve.

I need not say that I was heart and soul one with the great cause of the Republics. Nothing lay nearer to my heart than their welfare; and when it appeared that war was imminent, and that it would be disastrous to my people, it weighed upon my mind like lead.

War?—Ay, war! I feared a collision with England from the moment that Sir Alfred Milner proved at the Bloemfontein Conference that nothing could satisfy him. I became convinced then of what I had all along suspected, but would not believe, that the object of England was not to see that the Uitlander should obtain his rights, but that the two Republics should be annihilated, and that the map of South Africa should, as Rhodes had put it, be painted red.

These suspicions of mine soon proved not to have been unfounded.

President Kruger had consented, at last, to grant the franchise to Uitlanders, after a residence of five years in the country; and everybody thought now that war was averted, and that there would be a peaceful adjustment of the differences between England and the South African Republic. But England did not want that. England wanted the Transvaal. Contrary to the expectations of every-

one, the British Government did not accept the proposal of President Kruger, and said that it would dictate its own terms. It was speedily seen that England intended to do this by force of arms, for numbers of British troops had begun to mass on the boundaries of the two Republics.

At last England got what it had been seeking—a palpable *causa belli*, in the Ultimatum which the Transvaal Government, wearied to death, at last issued.

Both Boers and Britishers have declared that it was a fatal mistake on the part of the Transvaal to issue the Ultimatum. The Boers said that President Kruger should have waited until England had begun hostilities; and the English protested that there would have been no war, if there had been no Ultimatum. Lord Salisbury, especially, has never wearied in his attempt to make the world believe that England went to war with the Republics solely because of the insult offered by the Ultimatum; and that the two States themselves had by that act made it impossible for the British Government to permit them to retain their independence.

But the world knows better.

The world knows that it was England, not the Republics, that began the quarrel, when, contrary to the terms of the Convention of 1884, she interfered with the internal affairs of the South African Republic; when later on she would listen to no proposal of the Transvaal Government, and when she began sending troops to the boundaries of the two States. The world can comprehend also that the Republics could not wait until England had completed the massing of her troops on the borders, to wake up one morning and find themselves invaded from every side. The world, too, knows what must be said of the blow which falls in a manner mechanically, after unendurable provocation. And posterity, sitting in

judgment, will pass its verdict on the Ultimatum. It will say that it was a protest against wrong and oppression. It will hear a little people speaking through that Ultimatum to a great nation: "Thou art great and mighty, and thou wouldst set thy foot upon my neck; but I declare here before the whole world that Might is not Right; and I defy thee!"

I cannot enter into a discussion here of the question whether the South African Republic wronged the Uitlanders. But if this had been the case, was England then the knight-errant among the nations of the earth, to rush to the succour of such as might be oppressed by the one or the other Power?—And if she considered that this was her mission, why did she never attempt to teach Turkey, Russia, even the United States of America, what their duty was?

Nothing was further removed from the thoughts of England than such disinterestedness. But she imagined that she had a chance with this little people; and when she wished to beat the dog, she found a stick in the grievances of the Uitlanders.

Poor Transvaal, thou wert not perfect—far from that! But thou hadst had no time to become so. Thou hadst had no time to develop into what thou wouldst have become in the course of years. Thy great neighbour, arrived at maturity through centuries of imperfections, found thee a child, and, counting it a crime in thee to be a child, made a murderous assault on thee!

The negotiations between England and the South African Republic were still progressing when England sent troops, not only to the Transvaal, but also the Free State borders. What else but undisguised hostility could the Governments of the two Republics see in this action of England? They were compelled by it to prepare themselves for any emergency; and enjoined, in consequence, the landdrosts to instruct

the commandants of all the districts of the two States to commandeer the burghers. This commandeering took place on 2nd of October 1899. It was on Sunday, and many a Boer had gathered his household around him, and was sitting with his Bible open before him, while he was conducting his Sunday family worship, when the field-cornet, or other person sent in his stead, came and told him that he had to appear at a certain place, with his horse, saddle and bridle, rifle and thirty rounds of ammunition, and rations for eight days.

The Harrismith Commando was ordered to muster on the farm—*The Oaks*; and most of the burghers composing it arrived there next day. We proceeded thence to Tantjesberg, and approached in the course of a few days the boundary between the Orange Free State and Natal, on the grand range of the Drakensberg. To this border other Free State commandos numbering in all about 8000 men came, while a like number were sent to the western boundary, and a small force to the Basutoland line.

The southern border of the district of Harrismith was the line which had to be guarded, between the Orange Free State and Natal. The commandos, therefore, which had come from other places to this boundary, had to pass somewhere through the district of Harrismith. This happened in due course. During the week all the commandos passed east or west of, or through the town. The Bethlehem burghers pitched their laager on the south-west near Binghamsberg, a precipitous mountain which Erasmus Smit, the missionary who accompanied the Voortrekkers, called Kerkenberg (Church Hill) in his Journal. This he did because a great cleft of a tremendous rock at the foot of the mountain, in which the name of Piet Retief is written in green paint, afforded ample space for conducting divine worship. The Heilbron Commando went to Bezuidenhout's Pass, and the

Kroonstad to Tintwa. The burghers of Winburg marched past on the east of Platberg, and pitched their camp at Van Reenen, near the line of railway; while the men of the Harrismith and Vrede Commandos went farther east to Botha's Pass, and formed the connection with the line of the Transvaal forces on the west of Majuba.

It rained a great deal when these Boer forces hastened to the Drakensberg. I remember very well how the Heilbron and Kroonstad burghers rode through the town of Harrismith in the rain. Notwithstanding the depressing nature of the weather, everybody was cheerful, and all looked with boundless trust in God into the future. The Heilbron burghers did not remain in the town, but the men of Kroonstad waited at the church until their greatcoats and blankets, which they hung on the railings, were dry. Meanwhile our women poured out warm coffee for the men, and began thus to take their share in the great strife, which had begun.

I must here make mention of the manner in which the Government took the interests to heart of such as had been deprived of their employment through the new state of things. It appointed a commission in every town, whose duty it was to inquire into the condition of the needy and to distribute flour and mealie meal, wherever they found that there was great want. The Government also afforded facilities to the poor of earning money. It supplied the material for shirts and trousers, to be made for such burghers on commando as were in need, and paid a small sum for every garment that was made. The wives of the landdrosts and ministers were intrusted with this department. Besides this, the women of the towns were asked to bake biscuits—the Government supplying the flour for the commandos. It was beautiful to see how willingly the women undertook this hard labour. Some of them baked

as much as a bag of flour in a day; and I have seen at the Harrismith Station truck loads of biscuits ready to be carried to the forces in Natal.

This baking of biscuits was one of the first proofs of the devotion and self-sacrifice of our women.

But I have anticipated a little.

At five o'clock on the 11th October 1899 the forty-eight hours, which were given by the Transvaal to England to decide whether she would withdraw her troops from the borders of the Republics, had elapsed. England had not withdrawn her troops, and it was now clear to everyone that she desired war. Everyone knew also now that from that hour we were in a state of war.

It was now the interest of every chief-commandant (Hoofd-commandant) to occupy the best positions, if possible before the English could do so. With this in view, orders were given that all commandos should be sent forward with the utmost speed, and take positions on the Drakensberg. This was done, and by the 13th of October all the passes on the great mountain range were guarded by our forces.

On the same day a meeting of Free State officers was held in the tent of General Marthinus Prinsloo, and the question was there discussed whether a flying column should not, without delay, proceed west of Ladysmith and blow up the railway bridge over the Tugela at Colenso. Most of the officers were opposed to this idea, but it was resolved instead that portions of the commandos of Heilbron, Winburg, Kroonstad, and Harrismith should descend into Natal that very night, under the command of Commandant C. J. de Villiers, who was temporarily appointed General in the place of General A. P. Cronje. This force would have to co-operate with the Transvaal commandos and endeavour to cut off the retreat of the English at Dundee.

I was present when the Harrismith men were

ready to go. How well I remember the command given by the brave and never-to-be-forgotten Field-Cornet Jan Lyon—

"Four deep!"

I see him in my mind's eye now, while I write, placing himself, every inch a soldier, at the head of his men and riding away.

After him came Field-Cornet Z. J. de Beer with the Harrismith town burghers. They rode past in splendid form, with the Free State flag bravely fluttering in the breeze. Something thrilled through my being when I saw these men, all of whom I knew, ride away into the great unknown. I knew that some of them would never tread Free State soil again.

And it happened sooner than I thought.

Next day Field-Cornet de Beer collided with the Carbineers not far from Bester's Station, and the first burgher of the Harrismith Commando was killed. To the best of my knowledge he was the first victim of the war: his name was Jonson.

The Carbineers had attacked the men of Field-Cornet de Beer on a ridge, and bombarded them with a Maxim. Our burghers held their ground until Field-Cornet Lyon arrived with a reinforcement and charged the Carbineers on their right wing. The English could not resist this onslaught and betook themselves to flight, never resting until they arrived out of breath at Ladysmith. One of their officers, Lieutenant Galway, was taken prisoner, and sent to Harrismith. The camp of the Carbineers also fell into our hands, and the burghers were immensely pleased with the little light green tents they found. These were very portable, and went far and wide with the burghers in later stages of the war.

After addressing the Winburg men, I had returned to Harrismith on the morning of the 18th, and was an eye-witness of the intense excitement of the town

during the next few days, when news of battles fought in the north of Natal arrived. We heard of the fight at Glencoe on the 20th October, at Elandslaagte on the 21st, and at Rietfontein (Modderspruit) on the 24th. In the first two the Transvaalers had been engaged, in the last the Free Staters.

I was very strongly affected, and felt after the news of Rietfontein came that I could not remain at Harrismith. I therefore decided to go to Natal without delay and join the Harrismith Commando. On Friday the 27th October I took leave of my wife and children, and arrived in the afternoon at the headquarters of General Marthinus Prinsloo. He was very kind, and provided a cart for my journey and that of Dr. Cilliers who also wished to go into Natal. Next day I arrived at Bester's Station, and had the opportunity of visiting the burghers who had been wounded in the fight at Rietfontein. I was especially glad to see Mr. Jacobus de Jager of Loskop. As he was temporarily *hors de combat*, he offered me a horse and his own saddle for a time. I was of course very grateful and accepted his offer with alacrity.

After breakfast, next morning, I set out with the object of finding the Harrismith Commando, and soon came to Smith's Crossing. There I saw what a farm looked like where looting had taken place. Some of our burghers had destroyed everything there that was not firmly built on, or planted in the ground. The windows were smashed, the doors torn off, and everything that was of value or use was carried away. Presses and chests of drawers had been broken open, furniture dashed to pieces, pillows and mattresses cut open, and everywhere about there were lying scattered in dreadful confusion, feathers of pillows and beds, pieces of furniture, torn books, photographs, plates, pots, pans, even articles of female attire.

The sight of this affected me very unfavourably, as I found it did many others too. Several

remarked that we were not fighting for booty, but for the sacred cause of our independence. But the foreigners fighting among us against England laughed at our scruples. Destruction of property, they said, was a part of the war, and England would destroy our farms worse when once she began.

None of us would believe this assertion of the foreigners then. We know now how true it was. It is nearly three years now since I looked at the destruction at Smith's Crossing, and what have I not seen since of the destruction carried out by England? Everything done by the Boers is as dust in the balance, when compared with the devastation carried out by the British soldiers.

Now English officers, when taxed with the barbarity with which they devastated the farms in the two Republics, have been accustomed to retort that it was we who began the game. To this it can be replied that the Boers destroyed the houses of those only who had fled from their farms, and had thus shown that they were hostile to us; that even this was not done by order of the Boer Generals, nay, was done contrary to the express orders forbidding the destruction of farms, and that it was never carried out so ruthlessly as it was later by the English troops. The houses were never committed to the flames by the Boers, nor did they blow up any farmstead with dynamite. But the steadings in the Free State and Transvaal were destroyed by fire or dynamite by order of a British Field-Marshal, and later of a British Commander-in-Chief. And there were hundreds of cases where this took place over the heads of women and children, who were immediately after the destruction exposed to the wet weather in summer and the cold of winter. Nothing approaching such barbarity was ever done by the Boers. If, therefore, the English were making reprisals in burning the farms, they avenged themselves not as

Cain seven times, but as Lamech seventy times seven.

I did not have to go far from Smith's Crossing. I found the Harrismith burghers three miles to the west of Ladysmith, near the homestead of Mr. Gert Potgieter. They consisted of what was called a horse-commando, they were encumbered with no convoy, and only two or three waggons (one of them carrying ammunition) stood about. The difference between the camp here and the great laagers on the Drakensberg, with their walls of encircling waggons, struck me. Here there was nothing besides the little brown canvas Free State tents, and the beautiful little green tents taken from the Carbineers on the 18th. One would be much in want of many things, I thought, in a horse-commando, and life in it would be in the utmost degree repulsive, to a person especially with studious predilections, to whom the four walls of a study were more attractive than the wide, wide plains under the great blue vault above. I thought so then, but the time was coming when we should not have even little Carbineer tents.

However inhospitable a "horse-commando" appeared, the burghers were not so. They were mostly members of my congregation, and received me with the utmost cordiality. They gave me something to eat—just what they had ready—*Kaboemielies*, (boiled maize). What better—what more nutritious food could they have given me than mealies? Many a Boer poet has sung the praises of the mealies, but the inspiration of each has failed.

The day after I arrived in the laager, the 30th October, the battle of Nicholson's Nek was fought. It was in this fight that Christian de Wet made his first appearance. He was then an acting Commandant, and led about 200 men up the hill, where he captured 800 British troops. The Transvaal burghers were also engaged that day and took 400 soldiers

prisoners, so that we captured 1200 in all. I was not present. I only saw from a great distance our shells exploding on the battlefield, and I can therefore give no description of what took place.

I met the Rev. P. Roux, who was subsequently appointed General, next day. He told me that he came on the scene just when the fight was over. He had been struck, he said, by the distress of the wounded. It was terrible to see what they were suffering in the broiling sun. He had also spoken to several English officers. One had said in a surly tone of voice: "This is only a beginning." Mr. Roux had replied: "Yes, and we are quite satisfied with it."

CHAPTER II

A NIGHT MARCH

IT was decided to invest Ladysmith, and the Free State burghers were ordered to occupy positions towards the north-west, west, and south of the town. The Transvaalers took the opposite ridges and hills.

Why did not the Boers make an onslaught on the town after the fight at Rietfontein—why did not they do so after Nicholson's Nek?—or failing this, why did they besiege Ladysmith? Why did they not leave an opening on the south for the English to retire by?

Such questions have been repeatedly put after all was past, and it was seen what might have been done. But the people who put these questions assume circumstances which did not exist. For instance, it was altogether impossible in the as yet unorganised state of the commandos of the two States to venture on a united assault on Ladysmith, after either Rietfontein or Nicholson's Nek. And it is quite dubious whether the English wished to retire southwards. In fact the contrary appears to be the case, for they might have evacuated the town, if they had wished, before the 2nd of November,—eight days after Rietfontein,—on which date the Boers had completed the investment of the town. The British had, in point of fact, during those eight days not only shown no signs of any desire to leave the town, but they had made a sortie, which had resulted in the fiasco at Nicholson's Nek on the 30th of November.

It appears thus, when everything is taken into consideration, that no General would have acted otherwise than General Joubert did; and nobody, indeed, did think, during the siege of Ladysmith, that it was a mistake to be doing so. It was only later that all manner of mistakes were discovered in the besieging of Ladysmith, and not only of Ladysmith, but also of Mafeking and Kimberley.

The town was besieged. That is a fact. I have only to do with that fact now, and I am going to relate how the Free State commandos did their part of the work.

On the day after Nicholson's Nek, certain Free State Commandants were told by General A. P. Cronje, who had arrived on the 24th October and assumed his command, to march their burghers to the south of Ladysmith, and take up positions somewhere near or on the farm, Fouries Kraal. These burghers consisted of portions of the commandos of Harrismith, under Commandant C. J. de Villiers; Vrede, Commandant Anthony Lombaard; and Heilbron, Commandant L. Steenekamp. General Cronje was in command of the whole force.

Mr. Jan Wessels of Harrismith was appointed as guide, and the force began to move as soon as it got dark. This was my first experience of about a hundred night marches in which I took part during the war, and I must confess that it was one of the worst I was ever in. I learned to know the Africander in one of his weak points—his impatience of discipline. I saw how he rebelled against what was the legitimate authority under which he should have submitted.—How different it became later in the war! As I write now nearly three years have passed since that night march, and if I compare it with the night trek, for instance, of the 23rd of February 1902 (of which I shall give an account later), it is well-nigh impossible to believe that the strong, obedient

burgher of 1902 is the same man as the almost unbridled one of the end of 1899.

Everything was in chaotic confusion. One would have imagined that the burghers stood under no orders whatever, and yet orders had been issued. They were openly disregarded. It had been ordered, for instance, that there should be no smoking, and yet all along the route—we were going from the rear to the van—little flashes of light could be seen of matches, with which the men lighted their pipes. Nobody bothered his head about the question as to whether these lights could show our whereabouts to the enemy. Then the men had been told to proceed in absolute silence, and yet there was not even an attempt to do so. Besides a dreadful din which was raised by the drivers of the mules that were inspanned in the gun-carriages, the burghers conversed quite loudly, cracked jokes, and laughed in explosive guffaws—for all the world as if they were on some errand which involved no danger. In my immediate vicinity there was a young burgher of the name of Adriaan Venter—he was nicknamed *Dapperman* because of his gallant behaviour at Rietfontein. Well, this young fellow never wearied of saying funny things; and I heard him use now for the first time his favourite expression, "Jij is laat" (you are too late). This expression was soon adopted by everybody in the field, and was used whenever anybody had missed what he had had in view. Dapperman kept himself and all about him in the best of spirits from the beginning to the end of that night march, and it never entered his mind that scouts of the enemy might be a hundred yards from us. Nothing struck me more than the entire thoughtlessness of the burghers.

Just after we had begun to march, the clouds lowered, and it became very dark. We could not see one another. The jokes of Dapperman only told me that he was still near. Then it began to rain, and

the road became slippery. We progressed more and more slowly until at length we almost came to a standstill. This was caused through the difficulty which was encountered in taking the cannons through Sand River. The road at the drift had become so slippery that it was next to impossible for the mules to stand.

And meanwhile the darkness became thicker. I wondered whether I should be able to see my hand if I held it before my eyes. Yes I could, so what had been said of darkness so dense that you could not see your hand before your eyes was not applicable here. Still, it was so dark that you could not see the man you touched next you.

How provoking our slow progress was. We went twenty yards, and then we halted for five or ten minutes. Then off we went again, and came to a dead stop after we had progressed not more than twenty or twenty-five yards. What were they doing in front, we were wondering; and the answer came: "The guns can't get on."

Thus it went on until midnight. The General saw then that he could not proceed, and ordered us to stop. We halted just where we were on either side of the road we were travelling along.

Did the English know anything about us? I asked myself. There was nothing to prevent it. Not only was it so dark that English scouts could have been moving about among us, but we had shown them where we were with our matches, and the noise we had made had revealed the direction of our march. What, thought I, if they sent a shower of shells on us as soon as it became light. But this did not happen. The enemy had not yet recovered from what they had suffered at Nicholson's Nek, and a few days would elapse before a sortie from Ladysmith was again undertaken.

The morning broke dark and damp. Clouds hung

low in the sky and it looked like rain. This was not encouraging. Nor was it encouraging when we saw how little we had got on in the night. We were not more than two or three miles from where we had begun. But we had to go on now—daylight or not, whether we were seen or not.

The whole force came into motion. It was a beautiful sight to see the commandos together. I looked back from the van. The force was riding over a great level space. There were at least two thousand together. An insignificant number—but for us, the troops of two poor little republics, it was large.

The clouds did not deceive us. We had hardly begun to march when several heavy showers fell, and the prospect of a wet day was not pleasant. But to the relief of all the weather cleared up before nine o'clock, and the beautiful spring day followed: one of those days of unclouded sky which are so rousing and vivifying in South Africa. After a short morning trek we halted for breakfast, and then continued our march.

And now it began to be interesting.

A small body of Harrismith burghers had been told off to ride some miles in advance, while the main body came on behind. Nobody could know what might happen behind the ridges and kopjes which we were constantly approaching and passing. The utmost care was observed. We halted frequently until from time to time the reconnaissance of the country in front was satisfactorily completed. Now and then we saw living objects in the distance, and we could not know, of course, whether they were not scouts of the enemy; but after Marthinus Potgieter had observed the ridge or kopje through his long telescope and declared that the figures were Kaffir women, and after our scouts had passed without adventure, we knew that all was well, and went on.

We arrived at the house of an English missionary about twelve o'clock, and Commandant de Villiers turned aside to see him. The missionary showed signs of anxiety, and seemed to fear that harm would be done to him. Commandant de Villiers assured him that nothing would happen, if he put a white flag on the gable of his house as a sign that he was a non-combatant. I accompanied the Commandant, and enjoyed a cup of tea which the good wife of the missionary gave us. While we were drinking the tea I heard children's voices in another part of the house, and I was affected by them. A child always touches what is most tender in me. And here I remember that I was especially moved by the sharp contrast between those sweet children's voices and the harsh voices which I had heard during the last few days of men talking about nothing but the war.

We hastened forward, and had scarcely reached the main body when we saw in the distance some of our scouts galloping back. Field-Cornet Jan Lyon thereupon set spurs to his horse, and dashed forward with a small body of burghers. Soon we learned that, while a portion of our scouts were proceeding along a cutting near Onderbroek Spruit, they were fired upon by some Irish Fusiliers, who had concealed themselves behind huge boulders on the roadside. Isaac du Plessis was wounded in the thigh. The other portion of our advance party had gone over the hill, west of the road, and had fired on the Irish Fusiliers, with the result that they were driven off.

Isaac du Plessis was my first case. I bandaged him as well as I could, and he was sent away for proper medical treatment.

We passed by the spot where the incident had occurred, and I saw the corpse of a soldier lying on the roadside. He had been shot by our men from the hill. He lay on his back, and had been covered

by our burghers with grass. How well I remember the emotion that passed through me when I saw there for the first time the corpse of a man killed in action. How many it would be my lot to see and—bury.

Nothing further happened, until we arrived late in the afternoon at a spot on the high ranges of hills between Colenso and Ladysmith, about three miles east of the main road. I went with two others over the range, and they pointed out to me the tents of the English garrison, on the left bank of the Tugela, near the village of Colenso. The view was grand. A vast plain lay stretched out before us, and through it the greatest river of Natal was cutting its way, and swiftly descending to a series of rapids and falls into precipitous abysses. We stayed and looked upon the great scene until the fast falling shades of night warned us to return to the laager. Soon we were wrapped in deep and restoring sleep, for we were very tired.

CHAPTER III

BESIEGERS AND BESIEGED

LADYSMITH was now completely surrounded. It was besieged on the north and east by the Transvaal and on the west and south by the Free State commandos.

Early on the morning after we had marched to the south—on 2nd November—Field-Cornet Jan Lyon went with a body of men to Pieter's Station, broke up the rails there, and took the telegraph clerk prisoner. While he was doing this the two guns which we had brought with us were being dragged up the range of hills between Ladysmith and Colenso. One of them was put on the summit of a pointed hill a little south of Platrand (Cæsar's Hill),—the otheron the heights north of Colenso. I was present when Commandant de Villiers drew the latter up the precipitous slopes. There were huge boulders, as high as the wheels of a waggon, thickly strewn on the hillside, and over them the Krupp had to go. A strong span of oxen was put before the gun, and one could hear the creaking of the yokes as the oxen strained to draw the gun up, but as it became steeper and steeper it soon appeared that even the South-African ox had a task which it could not do. The wheels of the gun-carriage got jammed between the boulders and remained immovable. Then the burghers took the work in hand, and what ox-power could not do, human muscles accomplished. Some

of the men seized the yokes and the *trektouw*,[1] and others put their shoulders to the wheel, and up flew the gun. It was not long before the Krupp made itself heard. To the English fort near Colenso it sent a few shells—but the garrison there had fled.

The Winburg Commando was encamped a little more to the north-east than we were, and had an early surprise. While they were engaged in broiling meat for breakfast there were heard in sharp succession the reports of guns, and immediately several shells fell right in their midst. It is needless to say that there was a confused scramble in search of cover; but fortunately nobody was hurt. The enemy, having given an exhibition of their gun practice, retired immediately to Ladysmith.

The next day General A. P. Cronje sent 900 men chosen from all the commandos to take a ridge south-west of Ladysmith, not far from the house of Mr. Willem Bester, in order to oppose the enemy, who had made a sortie from Ladysmith in considerable numbers, on the road leading to Colenso.

From this ridge the burghers opened a steady fire on the approaching English, who were also subjected to a heavy and continuous bombardment. This went on for a considerable time, and then a number of mounted troops charged the ridge, but were repulsed. After that others rode into a donga to the west of our positions, and leaving their horses in it, emerged with the object of taking possession of a low reef of rock between themselves and us. But here, too, they were unsuccessful. Our men opened such a withering fire on them that they were obliged to abandon their design.

At this moment about 150 of the enemy gained possession of a hill to the south with the object of surrounding us by the east. Sixty Winburg and Harrismith burghers seeing this, charged them; but

[1] Chain to which the yokes are attached.

the bullets of the English fell so thickly on them that forty of them turned back, so that only twenty reached the top. There, however, they found themselves in such a terrific fire that they could do nothing, and were obliged to seek cover behind large boulders. Such was the state of things when our Krupp on the pointed hill sent a well-aimed shell among the English, and at once changed matters. The shell was followed without delay by another, and when the fourth came the enemy was compelled to retire. Then it was our opportunity. The twenty burghers emerged from their hiding-places and fired upon the retiring English, and the hill was quickly cleared.

While this was going on I was with the Harrismith Commando, which was madly galloping as a reinforcement to the fight. We had to pass a spot where shots occasionally fell, and as we raced along there, I heard for the first time in my life the whiz of a passing bullet. We went on, and arrived on the hill. But all was just then over, and we could only see the English retreating to Ladysmith. Twice or thrice yet they fired shrapnels at us, and again I had a first experience. It was of the sound, sharp and shrill, of a shrapnel that went over our heads. I don't know in what other words it can be described.

What a tyranny fear is! At the foot of the hill I saw a young burgher, utterly overpowered by it, lying behind a large stone and not daring to raise his head.

"Are you wounded?" somebody asked him.

"No," answered the terror-stricken youth, and pressed still closer to the stone.

I met Mr. Roux here again, and assisted him to bandage the burgher Gibson, who had been badly wounded in the leg. Two others also were wounded.

Nothing further happened now, and in the evening we were in our little field tents again.

During the following three days there was an

armistice in order to enable the enemy to get their women, children, and non-combatants out of Ladysmith into the Intombi Camp, between the town and Bulwana.

On Sunday, the 5th of November, our commando went to Pieter's Station. I had preached early in the morning for the burghers of Vrede; and now, after we had inspected the station, we gathered under a great camel tree, and had a most pleasant service. Just before the service some burghers slipped away unobserved and sped to Colenso. Arrived there, they helped themselves to what they fancied they needed in the shops. While they were thus engaged, an armoured train came from Chieveley, and began to fire on them.

We were lying unconcerned in the shadow of the great camel tree, when Commandant de Villiers got the report that some burghers were hemmed in at Colenso. He immediately gave orders that the horses should be saddled and rode thither, but we heard on the way that the culprits had, by the skin of their teeth, made their escape under a shower of bullets.

When we were returning to our laager, we met Kaffirs who had fled from Ladysmith. They drew a terrible picture of the state of the town. They told us that there were still unburied soldiers there, and that a bad smell pervaded the town. Women and children too had to endure great suffering, and were obliged to hide in holes which had been scooped out in the river's bank.

We did not know then that we had to take Kaffir reports with a grain of salt.

Towards the 10th of November the Free State laagers lay around Ladysmith in this order: Near the railway line to the east of Smith's Crossing was the laager of the Kroonstad Commando. To the west of the line, General Prinsloo had fixed his head-

quarters; and thence round to the south stood in succession the laagers of the Bethlehem, Vrede, Heilbron, Harrismith, and Winburg Commandos. Each Commandant had one or two guns. Commandant de Villiers had charge of two. For these he built forts on the hill upon which the 150 English were shelled in the fight of the 3rd of November. This hill lay to the west of Mr. Bester's house.

We Harrismith burghers pitched our camp at several places, but at last we fixed it permanently at the south-west of this hill. From the forts on the top of the hill you can see close at hand in the direction of Ladysmith the Neutral Kopje. Right before you in the depth you see the house of Mr. Bester, and there on the other side of the kloof rises Platrand, or Cæsar's Hill, on which the English are making forts and sangars. Every now and then you see a cloud of smoke from our cannon-forts, and a Krupp sends a shell on Platrand, to which the English with splendid aim promptly reply. From every side and every schanz the forts of the English were bombarded. The big gun of the Transvaalers on Bulwana, to which the British gave the name of Long Tom, was especially active, and sent its great shells regularly every day into the town.

And now we were living in the constant expectation that Ladysmith would speedily fall into our hands. Our expectations were also constantly strengthened by Kaffir reports. There was, the Kaffirs told us, very little food in the town, and the distress was great. Week after week, therefore, we were expecting that Ladysmith would capitulate, but week after week Ladysmith held out.

On the 14th of November another fight took place. The English made a sortie to the south-west of the town, and attacked a position where there were eighty men of the Vrede Commando. They opened a heavy cannonade on the rand and made it almost untenable

for the burghers there. Then our guns came to the rescue. The two Harrismith Krupps fired on the rear of the enemy. Others assisted, and everything was managed so effectively that the English had to retire precipitously. A man came to our laager in the evening and told us that he was in the Vrede position while it was being shelled. It had been terrible, he said. One poor fellow, a young burgher of the name of De Jager, had been hit in four places, while lying behind a boulder, by a shrapnel—three bullets had struck him in the shoulders and one in the head, and he had died immediately. Two others were slightly wounded.

Our laager had not been out of danger. A piece of a shell had fallen in it. Afterwards this happened frequently. Bits of missiles sent from Platrand to the cannon-forts above now and again came into our camp, to the great amusement of those who did not happen to be in danger at the moment. How funny it was to see the men near the spot scramble to cover when the danger was past.

About this time the Bethlehem Commando made a large capture of cattle. Some Coolies were taken prisoners on the occasion. Everybody naturally besieged the prisoners to hear something about Ladysmith. The wily Indians took in the situation at once, and told us what they knew would be agreeable to us. They "spoke comfortably to our hearts," and depicted the condition of the town in the most appalling colours.

Just at this time too—on the 15th of November—Commandant-General Joubert sent, under the command of General L. Botha, 1600 Transvaalers and 500 Free Staters to Estcourt. Some of them came into action with an armoured train near Chieveley. From the train a vigorous fire was opened on the Transvaalers, who replied with cannon and rifle. Some Free State burghers were in advance and

attempted to break up the railway. But as they had no tools to do this with, they could not, and instead raised the rails on one side and placed big stones underneath. The train then steamed back and two trucks were derailed. Immediately, under a heavy fire from us, the English set to work to remove the stones, and then the engine went backwards and forwards and came with every forward motion into collision with the trucks. It succeeded soon in removing the impediment, and sped away with the trucks which had not been derailed. Fifty-six troops and three civilians were taken prisoners. Among these was Mr. Winston Churchill, who escaped later in a very clever manner from the Model School at Pretoria, in which he was being kept confined as a prisoner of war.

We heard of this affair with the armoured train while we were chatting in very rainy weather in the tent of Commandant de Villiers. It was dripping wet outside and the laager had been converted into a perfect puddle of mud by hundreds of feet. General J. B. Wessels and Commandant Theunissen of the Winburg Commando were there on a visit. We were talking about the armoured train, and presently General Wessels related that a man had been taken prisoner the day before by the Winburg burghers. This man had been found in a Kaffir hut, and had with him a basket of pigeons, which he had brought from Maritzburg to smuggle into Ladysmith. But as Dapperman said, "*He was too late.*"

It did rain that day! and in the evening a steady downpour set in. I sympathised with the sentries and outposts, who had to take duty on the top and the slopes of the hill. What a cheerless thing it was, I thought, to sit through the livelong dripping night with no shelter, and to gaze into the darkness.

I can give no account of the adventures of the expedition which General Joubert sent to Estcourt,

as I did not accompany it. I can only say that the burghers composing it did not remain long south of the Tugela, and were obliged by great numbers of troops to return to Ladysmith. General Joubert, however, said that he had succeeded in his object of preventing all the English troops from massing on the western borders of the Free State.

Shortly before the expedition was sent to Estcourt, the portions of the several commandos which had been left on the Drakensberg were ordered to descend into Natal and join the besiegers of Ladysmith. They arrived in due time, and brought all the waggons with them. We had after that the convenience of a laager. Tents of every shape and size soon sprang up everywhere between the great waggons, and nobody who was not actually on duty needed to have any apprehension with regard to heat, or cold, or wet. There were indeed several who had raised their voices against the bringing down of the waggons, and had said that they would prove to be an encumbrance, in case a hasty retreat became necessary, but the majority of the burghers were bent upon taking it easy—even in the war—and demanded that the waggons should be brought down.

As far as I was concerned, though I did not approve of the presence of the waggons, it was a personal pleasure to have a large square tent with a table in it. Writing on a table was a decided improvement to writing on a book, or a pad, on one's knees, or on the ground.

That tent in which I wrote!—how I remember it, while I am in Cape Town writing my book over again.

The time passed swiftly, though it dragged from moment to moment. This was one of the first things that struck me in the war. I would wake in the morning and feel the duty of the day lying on me, as a burden which could not be lifted. But when the

shadows of night had fallen I found that the burden had been borne. It often seemed as if the future lay far beyond my reach, but after an hour, a day, a month was past, the hours seemed to be seconds, the days hours, and the months weeks.

The burghers were terribly bored in the laager? Why? They wanted nothing. The Government provided meat, bread (in the shape of meal), coffee, sugar, potatoes,—sometimes tobacco;—we even lived in luxury, for our wives sent us fruit and vegetables, cake and sweets. Why, then, did the burghers feel bored in the laager?

The reason is that the Africander is not a soldier, who can take kindly to camp or barrack life. The Boer detests a confined life, and whenever he is away from the open plain, and the free breezes of heaven, he is miserable. Thus it was that every burgher now longed to be back on his farm.

How I pitied the Commandant! He was continually besieged by burghers asking leave to go home. They asked for leave on the slightest pretexts, or with no pretext whatever; for they would give as a reason for leave of absence the work which had to be done on the farms. The women looked after that as well as, and in many cases better than, the men themselves had done. No, in the majority of cases there was no sound excuse to justify a request for leave. It was simply because they could not stand the confinement of the life in a laager.

Towards the end of the third week in November, one of the heavy guns of the Transvaal—another Long Tom—was brought into the Harrismith laager in order to be placed on the hill where our two guns stood. What a monster it was!

A wooden platform of thick deal beams was constructed in the fort, and Long Tom was drawn into position during the night. On the following morning it fired on the forts at Platrand (Cæsar's Hill), and

the terrific recoil splintered the stout beams of the platform as if they had been thin lathes. The platform had to be rebuilt and rendered stronger.

While we were doing this, the English were not idle. They were busy putting a heavy gun on Platrand into position; and on the following day they sent shell after shell, which pulverised the rocks and ploughed the ground, but which happily did no injury to Long Tom.

On Sunday, 26th November, I visited the Bethlehem laager with the intention of holding divine service there. On arriving, I found everything in a state of hurry and bustle. Here someone was roasting coffee, there another was shoeing his horse, yonder a third was greasing the axles of his waggon. The cause of all this activity was that the commando had been ordered to the western border by the War Commission, and that they were preparing to start.

I succeeded in my intention of addressing the burghers, and took as my text the comforting words of St. Paul: "Be of good cheer: for I trust in God, that it shall be even as it was told me."

A fortnight afterwards, Acting-Commandant Christian de Wet was appointed General, and likewise ordered to the western border. His achievement at Nicholson's Nek had fixed the attention of the War Commission on him, and he was now called to take upon himself the rank and important duties of a General. I had no suspicion then that Christian de Wet had begun the career which would make him famous throughout South Africa; nay, throughout the world!

Thus far we had busied ourselves exclusively with the enemy hemmed in at Ladysmith; but on the 28th of November the Boers were also threatened from the south of the Tugela. On that day a considerable number of troops advanced from the direction of Chieveley, and opened a heavy fire on

the Boer positions north of the river, with about twelve guns. The Boers replied, and our shells fell upon the British until they were forced to retire.

Platrand! What enchantment hung over that hill! From the first moment that we had come south of Ladysmith, it had been the talk of everyone that the hill should be taken; and about a week after the investment of the town, Commandant de Villiers had actually made a night march with the object of making an assault on it; but General Joubert had recalled him before he could begin the attack. Since then the cry had ever been: "The hill must be taken!" At last, wearied of the continual nagging, the combined War Council of the Transvaal and the Orange Free State decided that 900 men should storm the hill during the night of the 29th–30th of November.

Many considered the decision unwise. They were of opinion that the hill could not be taken without great loss of life, and that it was doubtful, after it was taken, whether it could be held. Nobody, however, opposed, and preparations were made to set out at two o'clock on the 30th of November.

Something, however, intervened.

At ten o'clock in the evening some Transvaal officers entered the tent of Commandant de Villiers, and pointed out that there was no shelter for the storming party, and that the dongas at the foot of the hill, instead of affording shelter, would prove disadvantageous to us in case we were forced to retire. One officer after another entered the tent until there were fifteen together, and all were opposed to the project of storming the place. At one o'clock they had convinced one another that Platrand could not be taken, and took it upon themselves to disobey the orders of the Council of War, and so far from storming Platrand at two o'clock, everyone was sound

asleep in his bed at that hour. The evil day was postponed.

On 7th December my son Charlie, aged 15, arrived in the laager. I had left him behind at Harrismith to go to school, but it was impossible to keep him there, and he had come to the laager at the first opportunity, after receiving my consent. When he had been with me but a short while he got a Lee-Metford from his friend Jan Cilliers, which had been taken at Dundee.

At this time it became clearer and clearer that some event or other might with certainty be expected from the south. The British Commander-in-Chief in Natal, General Buller, had been there for some weeks, and had had plenty of time to prepare himself. There was no doubt that he had been busy, for more and more troops had come from Durban, until the camps at Chieveley had grown to amazingly large proportions. Everyone then was expecting that something was going to happen soon.

But in the meanwhile something took place closer to us, which filled us with shame and indignation. In the night of the 7th–8th of December a number of English climbed Lombard's Kop, where the heavy gun of the Transvaalers was. They approached the fort in the greatest silence, but the picquet became aware of their approach and cried, "Werda?"

Someone answered in good Dutch, "Don't shoot. We are the Modderspruit burghers."

This satisfied the picquet, and the next moment the enemy was in the fort.

Our men were taken by surprise, but they fired notwithstanding, and a few English were wounded.

The few men in the fort were now forced to yield, and retreated before overwhelming odds. Then the British damaged Long Tom so seriously that it could not be used again for fifteen days. They also

partially destroyed a French quick-firing gun and captured a Maxim.

That same night another party of English damaged the railway bridge at Waschbank (near Dundee) in such a manner as to stop the running of trains for some days.

These two exploits of the English roused a feeling of dissatisfaction in the minds of the burghers. They considered it a dishonour to us, and although there were rumours of treachery, the general opinion was that it was rather the carelessness and want of vigilance on our side that was to blame. Everyone, on the contrary, meted out unlimited praise to the English, and said that they had done a gallant thing.

Two days after it was Sunday, and I held divine services in different places, according to my custom. On the same day, the Free Staters captured a Kaffir, who had brought letters, sewn under the lining of his sleeve, out of Ladysmith.

Those letters! How thoughtlessly they were read. Who cared that they were the utterances of the heart, even though the heart of an enemy? Who, whilst reading them, asked of himself: "What would I desire the enemy to do, if a letter of mine should fall into their hands?" These letters were from soldiers and civilians, mostly from husband to wife, or from wife to husband. They bore witness to a very miserable state of things in Ladysmith. One woman wrote that she lacked the common necessaries of life; another that she went barefoot. Besides private letters there was a report announcing that the troops were reduced to half rations, and that many of them were sick; and also that an unknown disease had broken out amongst the cattle.

Every day something happened, and the time passed rapidly. Was it not because there was always something to keep us busy? Yes, a thousand acts were crowded into each day.

The heart was filled with ever-changing emotions by the various occurrences of each day. And one's mind was not occupied by the war only. No! One's thoughts were drawn away irresistibly by the blue expanse overhead, and by the wondrous landscape around, stretching away to the finest horizons on earth. We lived in God's free nature, and as we came nearer to her great heart throbbing in the grey veld and the blue mountain, those of us who could felt ourselves borne away by a delicious but withal terrible Power. How glorious, too, were the evenings! How soothing was their deep silence after the exhausting, bustling summer's day! And then there was the breath of air from the east, which softly fanned the cheek, and calmed and laid to rest the turbulent passions that rent the breast.

I used to sit of an evening beneath the camel thorn-tree, under which Commandant de Villiers had pitched his tent, and gaze into the far west. There lay Spion Kop, tinted pink by the last rays of the setting sun. Far beyond rose the Drakensberg mountains with their rugged, dizzy crags, scored and scarred, already veiled in the shadows of night. What a thrill quivered through me when I presently looked up from that dark mass and saw the glittering gold, which had been laid for a moment on the clouds; or when, after the sun had set, turning, I beheld in the east the wonderful maze of colour in the sky. The soft pink merged into almost black purple, and this again, as if in need of support, rested on the blue black rock foundation of the earth.

I forgot in such moments that we were at war. I was deaf to the discordant sounds of the strife—the bursting of shells, and the whiz of bullets. It was as if I heard God speaking in the still small voice.

Can I ever forget those evenings? I am living them over again. I still gaze into that distant west, and seem to see the Unseen in that wonderful vision:

God, the Incomprehensible, the Unsearchable. I see how He paints every evening a new picture on the mountains and on the clouds. But He hides Himself in His picture. It is the robe, indeed, in which He reveals Himself, but it is only the border, as Isaiah says, the border of His robe: only the hem of His garment, and it—FILLS THE TEMPLE!

CHAPTER IV

GENERAL BULLER'S FIRST GREAT ATTEMPT TO BREAK THROUGH

SINCE the beginning of November we had heard, as I have already said, that Sir Redvers Buller had landed at Cape Town, and that he was in supreme command of the troops in Natal. We also knew that he was busy preparing himself for a grand attack upon our forces around Ladysmith, in order thus to relieve Sir George White there.

Towards the end of November General Joubert received reports every day of how matters were proceeding south of the Tugela. It was reported to him that large numbers of troops were continually arriving from Durban, and were occupying immense camps at Chieveley. Now, as it was impossible to know exactly where General Buller would try to break through, it was necessary to place commandos up and down the Tugela, with Colenso as a centre. This was done. Various Transvaal commandos took possession of the ridges opposite Colenso, and others were sent to the east of the railway across the river to Klangwane, a wooded hill a few miles east of the village, while General A. P. Cronje with from 1500 to 2000 men trekked about twelve miles to the west.

I will here mention the names of the Transvaal commandos that occupied the ridges opposite Colenso, because it was by them that the attack of General Buller was repulsed. They consisted, to begin with the

most easterly wing, of a portion of the Krugersdorp Commando; next to them were in succession westward the burghers of Heidelberg, Boksburg, Johannesburg, the Swazieland Police; the Ermelo burghers and the Zoutpansberg Commando on the wing farthest west.

These men worked night and day digging trenches and throwing up earthworks. They did not make these works on the top of the mountain range, where one would have expected them to, but on low ridges close to the river. The enemy would thus, in case they attacked, first bombard the wrong places, and the troops would approach to within a very short distance of the position, and be subjected to a severe rifle fire, before they knew from whence they were being fired on.

The first days of December passed by, and although there was no attack, there were, however, signs every day to show that the English were making preparations, and all held themselves in readiness.

Two or three days before the 15th of December one of the Transvaal gunners, an Englishman, deserted, and as there was reason to fear that he might acquaint the enemy with the preparations that had been made to repulse an attack, General Louis Botha changed the positions of the guns and also made the men dig other trenches and throw up new earthworks. These trenches were dug on the level ground between the ridges I have mentioned above and the river. If the former trenches were made where the enemy would not expect them, this was still the case with the new ones which were now made, as the result proved.

On the 14th of December Commandant de Villiers rode in the direction of Colenso to see if he could discover any new developments in the preparations of the enemy. He came to the top of the high hill between Colenso and the Boer laagers around Lady-

the other about three miles to the east. Presently the British cannon opened a tremendous fire on the ridges behind the burghers and the shrapnel burst everywhere with terrific sound. The noise was deafening, but our men did not answer. The English advanced, the flanks approaching nearer and nearer to the centre, and there were some of our officers who sent word to General Botha, beseeching him to give the order to fire. No. He let the English come nearer and nearer. Not a Boer could they see. Nearer and nearer the troops advanced. They became over confident. The Boers had certainly fled and left the road to Ladysmith open.

Suddenly General Botha gave the command. The cannon thundered forth the signal, and a fearful storm of lead fell upon the over-confident soldiers. They had not expected it, and the shock was terrible. Nevertheless they advanced, and continued pressing forward, only to be mown down by the withering fire of our Mausers.

In the meanwhile they had discovered where our burghers were, and a fierce cannonade was directed on them, which, however, wonderful to relate, did hardly any damage.

At last the troops ceased to advance on the west wing. It was then that I arrived on the hill. But in the centre attempts were still being made to break through, and in endeavouring to do this, they approached so near to the Boer positions, a little to the east of the railway line, that they could fire on the bodyguard of General Botha and on the Krugersdorp Commando from a distance of not more than eight hundred yards. Our men opened a terrible rifle fire on the gunners, and in a moment all was quiet. Not a single cannon there fired another shot.

The English perceived that they had brought twelve guns to a spot from whence they could not get them away again. Notwithstanding this they

rushed in to save the guns. From the hill above I saw how the matter went, and I do not think that a more heroic deed was done in the whole war than the rush of the English to save those guns.

It was a magnificent sight!

Team after team of horses I saw galloping in the same direction. I saw how mercilessly they were mown down by the bullets of our Mausers and the shells of our Maxim-Nordenfeldts. I saw how they persevered in their efforts, till at last they ceased their attempts.

I could not, at the moment, understand what it all meant, and thought that the English were trying to take a position, whence they could rush across the bridge, and it was only in the evening that I heard that this splendid gallantry had been displayed in order to save the guns.

Two of the twelve guns were rescued, but the English could not get away the rest. General Botha made this impossible when he sent men through the river to fetch them. These men waded the stream breast high, and took positions so near the guns that it became absolutely impossible for the British to make any further attempts, and ten of the twelve guns fell into our hands together with a number of soldiers who were there.

General Botha had been the soul of everything in this great battle. He went from position to position encouraging his brave Transvaalers. Here he would direct their fire, and there he would send reinforcements. Everything was controlled by him.

Some days later I had a conversation with Colonel de Villebois, who had also been present at the battle. He said to me: "General Botha is a true General. I saw this during the battle of Colenso. If I discovered a weak point in the Boer positions, General Botha had perceived it before me, and was already busy strengthening it. He is a true General."

Shortly after midday all was over.

Sir Redvers Buller commanded that the troops should retire. His plan had been a great one, his troops had fought bravely, but they had failed, failed splendidly.

The Boers, on the other hand, had repulsed the terrible attack. But they did not ascribe it to their own efforts; no. General Botha telegraphed to his Government that evening: "The God of our fathers has given us a brilliant victory."

Our loss was, incredible as it may seem, seven killed, of whom one was drowned, and twenty wounded. There had not been more than 3000 men in the positions from whence the British had been repulsed!

On the following day Dingaan's Day was celebrated in all the laagers with excessive joy, as might be expected. The Africander nation perceived a new proof of God's protecting hand in what had happened on the previous day, and the future seemed bright.

On Monday, the 18th, I left for my home, in order to celebrate Christmas and New Year with my family. I remained at Harrismith till the 4th of January 1900.

CHAPTER V

PLATRAND

ON Friday afternoon, the 5th of January 1900, I was back in the laager of Commandant de Villiers once more.

In the evening I sent a letter to my wife in which *inter alia* these words appeared: "And now I have no time to write anything more, but, as the post leaves to-morrow, I wish you to know as soon as possible of my safe arrival." I wrote nothing that could cause uneasiness, and yet there was much that would have made her anxious if I had written about it. Would this letter be the last I should write her? I asked of myself; for we were on the eve of attacking Platrand (Waggon Hill).

As I have said in a former chapter, it had from time to time been insisted on that Platrand, as being the key to Ladysmith, must be taken. This had constantly been insisted on. General Prinsloo had declared that the hill ought to be taken, and that he could do it with 100 men. President Steyn had also telegraphed, saying that it was desirable to have Platrand in our possession. Not a day passed without regret being expressed that the rand had not been taken when, on former occasions, attempts had been partially made, and now more than ever it was thought that this should be done. This string had been so continuously harped upon that the combined War Councils of the Transvaal and Free State once more decided that an attempt to gain

possession of Platrand should be made. After I had held evening service for the first time since my return, Commandant de Villiers made known to the burghers that men from every commando would proceed to the hill that same night.

This famous hill, named Waggon Hill by the English, lies about three miles south of Ladysmith, between the residence of Mr. Willem Bester and the town. It runs from east to west. The ascent is very steep and its slopes are partially covered with mimosa. On the summit the hill is level, and round about its crest runs a cornice, to use an architectural term, of great rocks, which we call a "krantz" in the Africander language.

The British forts were built immediately above this "krantz." The idea was that about 4000 men should make the attack. It was decided that the Free Staters should scale the rand from the west and south-west, and the Transvaalers from the south-west and south sides.

The Free Staters were drawn from the Kroonstad, Heilbron, Harrismith and Winburg Commandos; and the Transvaalers from the commandos of Vryheid, Utrecht, Wakkerstroom, Standerton, and Heidelberg.

The understanding was, that, after the storming party had taken the hill, reinforcements would come from all sides to support them, and thus carry out the attack. At about ten o'clock we, Harrismith burghers, left the laager, in order to climb the hill at half-past two, in accordance with the arrangement that had been made. We soon reached the Neutral Hill. Here we halted a while, and those who could slept till one o'clock on Saturday morning, the 6th of January 1900.

From there the burghers proceeded on foot. It was very dark, and all was still as death. We walked forward slowly and spoke only in whispers; and yet our progress was not so silent but that we feared

we should be heard. In the silence of the night, the slightest rustle of tree or shrub sounded loud in our ears, and the thud of our feet on the loose stones seemed to me like the tramp of a troop of horses.

The enemy, thought I, would certainly become aware of our approach long before we could even begin to climb the hill. But it seems after all that I was mistaken, and that the sentry did not discover us until we had approached very close. At three o'clock we reached the deep dongas at the foot of the hill, and the foremost men passed through. In about twenty minutes we had climbed almost two-thirds of the hill, when we heard a beautiful voice ringing out on the morning air: "Halt! who goes there?"

No answer came from us. We continued climbing.

A moment passed, and then the silence was broken by the crash of a volley. Then another and another. Everywhere above in front of us the flashes of the rifles leapt forth into the darkness, and the sharp reports followed in such swift succession as to give the impression of Maxims firing. All of a sudden I saw a great long jet of flame, and instantly the thunder of a cannon broke upon the startled air, and presently behind us I could hear the shrapnel bullets falling on the ground.

Then many of those who had not yet begun to climb the hill turned and fled; but others rushed upwards and rapidly approached the cornice of rocks whence the heavy firing issued. Silence was now unnecessary; and voices were heard everywhere encouraging the men.

Field-Cornet Lyon and Zacharias de Jager in particular were of great assistance to the Commandant; and one constantly heard, "Come along, burghers! come along! forward!" At half-past three we reached the reef of rocks and boulders, and presently I heard that two burghers had already

been wounded, while another lay motionless, but it was as yet too dark to see who it was. It soon transpired that it was Assistant Field-Cornet Jan van Wijk.

Before long it became light, and some of the burghers charged the forts that were just above the ledge of rocks. They overpowered the soldiers there, and took them prisoners, but were forced to fall back to the escarpment of rocks immediately, on account of the heavy fire directed on them from the other forts. And now the roar of the cannons and rifles became terrific. This was especially the case with the ceaseless rattle of small arms. One could with difficulty distinguish separate reports. All sounded together like one continuous roar, and awoke an echo from the Neutral Hill that sounded like the surging of a mighty wind.

We found ourselves under a cross cannon-fire. The shells from one of our guns flew over our heads and exploded just in front of us on the forts, so that we were often in fear of being struck by our own shells; and the projectiles of the English were hurled in an opposite direction on our cannon-forts and on the burghers on Neutral Hill.

Gradually we began to see in what a terrible position we were. We found that we were a mere handful. Of all the Free Staters who had been ordered to scale the hill there, only about 100 Harrismith men, 50 Heilbroners, and a few of the Kroonstad Commando, had obeyed the order. The arrangement had not been carried out. As we learned afterwards, the Winburgers had remained behind in a ridge at the foot of the hill, and the rest were all crowded behind Neutral Hill, while most of the Kroonstad burghers had not even got as far as that.

Of course we did not fully know then how matters stood, and expected that reinforcements would come

later on, which was impossible while daylight lasted, for every approach to our position was exposed to a terrible fire from above. It set us, however, somewhat at ease to know that there were burghers behind the Neutral Hill. They guarded our rear and left flank, and would beat back reinforcements attacking us there.

How terrible the firing was! It never ceased for a moment, for if the burghers did not rush out, from time to time, to assail the forts, the English charged us. This alternate charging of each other was taking place every now and then, and it was during these attacks that the pick of our men fell. Whenever a sangar was attacked a destructive fire was directed on our men, and then some gallant fellows would always remain behind struck down. In this manner Field-Cornet Celliers of Heilbron, and of the Harrismith Commando: Kootze Odendaal, Marthinus Potgieter, Gert Wessels, Zacharias de Jager, Jacob de Villiers, and Piet Minny, were killed; and Hermanus Wessels and others mortally wounded. They were mostly hit in the head, for the English as well as the Boers were on the watch, and whenever anyone put out his head from behind a stone or a fort, he was immediately fired at.

It was a fearful day—a day that no one who was there will ever forget. The heat too was unbearable. The sun shot down his pitiless rays upon us, and the higher he rose the hotter it became. It was terrible to see the dead lying uncovered in the scorching rays; and our poor wounded suffered indescribable tortures from thirst.

How glad I was that I could do something for the wounded. I bandaged those within reach. I also rendered the first help to the British wounded; one Tommy said to me, after I had bandaged him: "I feel easier now." And a sergeant of the Imperial Light Horse, who had discovered that I was a minister,

remarked: "You are preaching a good sermon to-day."

How the wounded suffered from thirst! And there was nothing to give them—only a little whisky which I had got from an English officer who had been taken prisoner. I gave a little of that, only a few drops, to every wounded man. Not only the wounded—all of us, suffered from thirst. Long before midday there was not a drop of water left in our flasks. So intolerable was the thirst, that there were burghers who went down to the dongas below in search of water, where there was none, and where they knew that almost certain death awaited them.

How slowly too the time dragged! "What o'clock is it?" someone asked. It was then only ten o'clock, and it seemed as if we had been fighting more than a day, for up to that moment the firing had continued unabated; and the Neutral Hill still sent back to us the echo of the firing—the echo as of a mighty soughing.

Twelve o'clock passed, one o'clock, two o'clock—and still the fire was kept up; and still the burning rays of the sun were scorching us. Clouds! But they threw no shadow over us. Everywhere small patches of shade checkered the hills and valleys; but they seemed to avoid us.

But a black mass of cloud is rising in the west, and we know now that everything will soon be wrapped in shadow. Nearer and nearer to the zenith the clouds are rising. What is that deep rumbling in the distance? Thunder! Nearer and nearer it sounds, and presently we hear it overhead above the din of the musketry and the boom of the cannon. How insignificant the crash of the cannons sounds now. It is as the crackle of fireworks when compared with the mighty voice of God!

We got more than shadow from the clouds. At five o'clock great drops splash on the rocks. Presently

the rain fell in torrents, and I could wash the blood of the wounded from my hands in it.

It was now, just when the rain was descending in sheets of water and the thunder-claps were shaking the hill, that the enemy redoubled their efforts to drive us off the ledge, and our men had to do their utmost to repel the determined onslaught. Had they been driven down to the plain below, every burgher fleeing for his life would have formed a target for the enemy. The fight was now fiercer than at any time during the day. It is fearful to hear the roar of the thunder up above, and the crash of the rifles below. But the enemy did not succeed in driving us off. We remained there two and a half hours longer. Meanwhile we had been able to quench our thirsts. We had made folds in our mackintoshes in which we caught the rain, and then sucked it up. Streams of water too dashed down through the rocks, and we drank our fill. These streams of water came from the forts a few yards above us, and were red in colour. Was it red earth, or was it the blood of friend and foe that coloured the water? Whatever the cause, we were so thirsty that nothing would have kept us from drinking. After the English had done their utmost to drive us from the hill, and been baffled in their attempts, they returned to their forts, and the firing subsided for a short time. It was quieter now than it had been during the whole day, and the burghers had time to think how wet they had got. Those who had no overcoats were drenched to the skin, and many who an hour before did not know where to find shelter from the heat, could now scarcely endure the cold. A keen wind, too, blew on our damp clothes, and strong men stood shivering in the biting breeze.

It was now asked, "Where is Field-Cornet Jan Lyon?" Commandant de Villiers had known for more than an hour that that brave man had fallen; he spoke to no one about it, for fear that the

burghers should be discouraged. It could not, however, remain a secret. Soon everyone knew what had happened, and every countenance fell.

At last the sun set, and as it was clear to Commandant de Villiers that no reinforcements would come, and as he had already lost at least a third of his men, killed and wounded, he saw that it was impossible to remain there. He therefore told me that he would continue there a little while longer and withdraw when it became dark.

This took place at half-past seven. We had been on the hill for sixteen hours under a most severe fire, and now we retired; but we were not driven off by the Devons with levelled bayonets as I have read in an English book. We were not driven off the hill. We held it as long as it was light, and when twilight fell, Commandant de Villiers considered it useless to remain there. He stopped there till the last man had gone, then fired some shots, not, however, at Devons advancing with fixed bayonets, but in the air, in order to make the English think that we were still all in our positions. We then tramped through the water, till we reached our horses, and then rode to the laager, depressed in spirits, for we had left very dear ones behind us.

Of the Harrismith Commando there were 15 killed and 20 wounded; Heilbron, 4 killed and 13 wounded; Kroonstad, 3 killed and 2 wounded; Winburg, 1 wounded. Altogether 22 killed and 36 wounded. Including the Transvaalers, we had lost 68 killed and 135 wounded.

I can give no description of how the Transvaalers had fared, as I was not on their side of the hill; but there was the same lack of co-operation amongst them. Only the men of one commando had scaled the hill, and they, too, had to retire for want of support. Where were the 4000 who had been ordered to take the hill? Shamefully and criminally had they left

their comrades in the lurch. In the highest circles, too, there was great mismanagement. One of the Long Toms, which had to take an important part in the battle, had three charges! Another gun, too, should have been posted at a certain spot; but it never turned up. One felt embittered on hearing of such disgraceful mismanagement.

The next morning dawned, and inexpressible emotion surged through me when in a moment I lived again through the events of the preceding day. I thought of Jan Lyon and the other brave fellows who had fallen; and when I knew that I should see them no more, my heart became as lead within me.

It was a beautiful morning after the storm. The sun rose in glittering splendour over the refreshed earth; and soulless nature smiled regardless of the grief which tore the heart. It seemed as if the heat and the burden of the day could not be borne; but it had to be borne!

In answer to a request from Commandant de Villiers, Colonel Ian Hamilton had sent him a few lines giving us permission to fetch our killed and wounded.

I accompanied a party of twelve, who went for that purpose. Our dead were brought down from the hill by soldiers and laid in a row,—nineteen dead! We placed our dead in a waggon, and conveyed them to the laager.

The Heilbron Commando buried their own dead. Zacharias de Jager, Marthinus Potgieter, and Jacob de Villiers were taken to Harrismith, and there laid to rest. The other burghers, with their Field-Cornet Jan Lyon at the head, were buried in separate graves, alongside of one another, about a mile from the laager.

It was my sad duty to address the men. I could have wept, as I saw others do, especially at the thought of those amongst the slain who had been

my personal friends; but I felt that I had to restrain my feelings there. It was my duty to encourage the men and turn their minds to God. And God helped me to accomplish this; and, however bitter the sorrow of everyone was before those graves were filled, we returned from that sacred spot to the laager encouraged and hopeful.

CHAPTER VI

THE FIRST OF OUR DARK DAYS

THE burghers soon recovered their spirits after the affair at Platrand. Their dejection disappeared, and gave place to an activity which showed itself in their willingness to perform any duty laid upon them. They dug new trenches everywhere, on the top and along the sides of the hill occupied by us, and built new "schanzes" (breastworks). There was also more vigilance, Commandant de Villiers sent more burghers on guard every night, and they went willingly. Then, too, a better spirit took possession of the men. There was a greater sense of comradeship amongst friends than formerly; there was no brawling, and swearing was seldom heard. It seemed, too, as if the burghers felt the need of religion more; for a request was made, emanating from them, that prayer-meetings should be held in the laager, in small groups, every Sunday afternoon.

Shortly after the Platrand battle, a rumour went round that it was the intention of General Buller to break through within seventy-two hours and relieve Ladysmith. Very little belief was attached to this particular rumour, although we were convinced that the English intended soon to make a new and powerful attempt to relieve their besieged comrades. But soon there seemed to be some truth in the rumour after all; for, from about the 10th of January, great numbers of troops were seen moving from Frère to Springfield,

a place about twelve miles west of Colenso, on the right bank of the Tugela. We could thus surmise that General Buller intended breaking through in that vicinity.

As I have already mentioned, General A. P. Cronje had marched up along the Tugela with a number of Free Staters some time before. He had kept to the north side, and was stationed not very far from Potgieter's Drift. He now went towards the cluster of hills of which Spion Kop is the highest peak.

These hills form a sort of a range running from north to south, on the left bank of the Tugela, about ten miles west of Ladysmith. Standing on the summit one sees the beautiful Tugela, monarch of Natal rivers, majestically winding and cutting its way through the plain. South yonder, to the left, the main road can be seen passing through the river at Potgieter's Drift, and leading towards Ladysmith at the foot, eastwards of Spion Kop. There is another road passing through the river higher up at Trichaard's Drift, which to the north joins the road from Acton Homes to Ladysmith. This road climbs the mountain two or three miles north of Spion Kop. Now, if General Buller intended fording the Tugela from Springfield, at either Potgieter's or Trichaard's Drift, to go to Ladysmith, he would have to bring his troops along one or both of these roads.

Our Generals, therefore, took up positions all along the range. General A. P. Cronje posted his men on the hill to the north-west of Spion Kop and guarded the road from Acton Homes. During the battle Commandant de Villiers stationed himself on Cronje's right, to the west of the Acton Homes road. The Vrede burghers were placed by General Cronje on his left, south-west of the road from Potgieter's Drift. And everywhere between the Free State positions lay the Transvaalers, who had hurried to Spion Kop immediately the intentions of the English became evident.

Thus, for example, to mention no others, General Burger occupied positions in the immediate vicinity of Spion Kop.

While the British were massing at Springfield, the Boers did everything in their power to strengthen their positions. They threw up splendid breastworks everywhere on the hill, from the south-west of the Potgieter's Drift road, up to the north of the other road. They sought out the best places for cannon, and constructed forts wherever necessary.

The movements of the English were most narrowly watched. No act of theirs escaped our notice.—Where in the world can be found better scouting than among the Boers?—And so it was seen that the English were placing guns on Swart Kop, a wooded hill on the south bank of the Tugela, somewhat to the east of Potgieter's Drift.

It was now clear to all that the enemy would attempt to break through somewhere in the mountains of Spion Kop. We did not have to wait long. On the 16th it was seen that troops and heavy guns were being brought through the river at Potgieter's Drift. At the same time large numbers of troops were proceeding through Trichaard's Drift, and everybody knew that matters would soon come to a head. And so it proved.

Early on the following morning, 17th January, the cannon — great naval guns — began to roar from Swart Kop, and the eight days' battle of Spion Kop had commenced.

Soon now the troops passed by the road from Trichaard's Drift through Venterspruit and slowly commenced to climb the hills.

A number of their mounted men detached themselves from their left wing and hurried on in the direction of Acton Homes. It was clear that they must be stopped, and some of our men were immediately sent to oppose them. These men came in

contact with the English on the following day, and fell into an ambush.

Believing the English to be still ahead, they found themselves attacked in front and on their flank. They hastily took up position on a kopje and defended themselves for a time with unparalleled gallantry. There were some of them who wanted to hoist the white flag when they found themselves in a fearful cross fire; but the others declared that they would shoot the first man who did so. Field-Cornet Mentz—better known by his *nom de plume* of Mordecai—fought like a lion. But he received a mortal wound and sank to the earth to rise no more. After this our men, overpowered by superior numbers, were forced to yield. Several more had been killed and others wounded, and the enemy took twenty-four prisoners.

The English did not advance any farther from that point. They were prevented from doing so by the presence of numbers of Free Staters and Transvaalers in the road from Acton Homes to Ladysmith, but no fighting occurred there. The other forces, those that were advancing from Venterspruit, stormed the centre of the ranges in great numbers. They came on in two divisions, occupied some hills opposite our positions, and placed cannon on them.

Meanwhile the English cannon had crashed and thundered unceasingly since the preceding morning. The entire range was subjected to a terrible bombardment, from the Vrede positions, east of the road from Potgieter's Drift, up to our right wing on the Acton Homes road. Shells of every sort and size fell fast and thick on our positions. I saw the huge projectiles of the naval guns striking the earth, and how great clouds of dust and smoke arose whenever one of these huge shells came in contact with the earth. The ground was torn and ploughed up when the lyddite shells burst with a terrific crash, and their

yellow smoke gave the burghers headaches and made the water in their flasks bitter. The bombardment was fearful. Never for eight days long was there a pause. Clouds of smoke constantly rose from the earth, where the shells burst, and one could continually see the hundreds of vanishing cloudlets in the air where the shrapnels burst over the positions.

Our cannon, although greatly outnumbered, were terribly destructive. The gunners had the inborn talent of the Boer, alike of accurate aim and of judging distances, and to this was added the advantage of military training received at Pretoria or at Bloemfontein. So they did not fire at random, and their missiles always seemed to burst just where they were intended to. Our French quick-firing and Krupp guns often demoralised the advancing troops. Our Maxim-Nordenfeldts were the especial aversion of the British soldiers. We heard from some who were taken prisoners at Spion Kop that "Hell clock" was the name they gave our Pom-pom.

I visited the battlefield just in the middle of the eight days' battle, on Sunday, January 21, when the bombardment was at its fiercest. I found that it had often been so intolerable that the burghers were driven out of the earthworks and compelled to seek shelter behind the hill slopes. But they had always returned and kept up a continuous fire on the advancing soldiers. I found, too, that the English had as yet always been driven back, but that their repeated attacks had not had quite a satisfactory moral effect on the burghers. The direction of affairs was, however, in the hands of Commandant General Louis Botha, than whom there was no man better qualified to encourage the burghers. Just as at Colenso, so here he rode from position to position, and whenever burghers—as I have related—were losing heart and on the point of giving way under the awful bombardment, he would appear as if from nowhere and

contrive to get them back into the positions by "gentle persuasion," as he expressed it, or by other means.

A case in point happened on 21st January, while I was there. A few of our forts near the Acton Homes road were evacuated, and the English would certainly have taken possession of them—and thus been nearer to the attainment of their object—had not three Transvaalers remained there, and by firing rapidly, made such a demonstration that the British thought that the forts were still manned, while two others went to acquaint General Botha with the state of affairs.

It was then that General Botha once more persuaded the burghers to return to their positions; and the English did not approach any nearer there.

On the following day, when riding back to the laager, I was struck by the way the burghers were pouring in from all directions as reinforcements. I saw persons of every age going to the positions. There were amongst them boys and middle-aged men; there were even grey-beards. And the most remarkable thing about this was that all these men had not been ordered to the battle. They came of their own accord. I thought of a text in the Bible which, when separated from its context, was applicable here, "Thy people shall be willing" (Ps. cx. 3).

Amongst them was a youth of fifteen or sixteen, who was met by Commandant de Villiers. He was riding a chestnut pony and looked very shabby. Poor lad!

"Oom," he said to Commandant de Villiers, "I hear they are at it up here." He used the untranslatable word "spook."

"Yes," answered Commandant de Villiers. "And you? Where are you going to?"

"I am going to 'spook' too," said the boy, and rode off on his lean pony.

On the following day Commandant de Villiers met him again; but how changed he was. Instead of his dilapidated hat, a helmet of one of the soldiers adorned his head; and he, or rather his poor little chestnut, groaned under the equipment of two or three soldiers. He had three Lee-Metford rifles, several water-flasks were slung from his shoulders, and a number of bayonets hung at his horse's side and rattled whenever the animal moved. Besides this, he had also several of the small spades with which the English soldiers are provided; he had got his head through three or four cartridge belts.

"He had 'spooked' indeed!" thought Commandant de Villiers.

The attack from Venterspruit lasted for four days. It was fearful to witness what havoc our guns wrought amongst the English—especially the Maxim-Nordenfeldt.

But the British allowed nothing to baffle them. They were repeatedly driven back, and one constantly saw them carrying off their dead, and constantly they reappeared with new reinforcements. They built small entrenchments of stone and lay firing from behind them, and the shells exploded and our Mauser bullets rained upon these small fortifications. But there was no sign of retreat. The number of our dead and wounded had already reached nearly a hundred. We began to tremble as to how matters might turn out. How long would it last, we asked when the fourth day had passed and our burghers continued to suffer terribly under the bombardment.

How long, we asked ourselves, would our burghers be able to hold out?

At last the shades of the night of the 23rd of January closed in upon the horrible scene, and many anxiously questioned what the morrow would bring forth.

The night was dark and rainy, and this did not help to dispel the depression which prevailed; but the burghers were not discouraged; neither the four days' attack, nor the six days of shelling, nor the depression caused by the drizzling rain, could quench the quiet determination and courage of our men. They entered upon the night firmly resolved that, when the light of morning dawned, they would once more begin their schanzes and again face the fire of the guns, and beat back the ever-returning odds.

On the following day everything looked dark. The mountain was enveloped in a dense mist, and for a long time the men lay behind their schanzes waiting for what would happen when the vapours were dispelled.

After some time the weather cleared, and what was the surprise of all to see that there were English on the summit of Spion Kop! They had climbed the mountain under cover of the dark night. And there were some who said that all was over with us now. The battle was lost.

But the burghers who were in the vicinity of the Kop were not of this opinion. General Burger reported to General Botha how matters stood, and he himself gave orders to Commandant Prinsloo of the Carolina Commando to storm the Kop. This was carried out splendidly by Prinsloo and his Carolina burghers, at the cost of 55 killed and wounded out of the gallant 88. The burghers of Lydenburg and Heidelberg also took part in the onslaught. And when General Botha soon afterwards stormed the Kop from another direction, no one doubted but that the attack would succeed. In the meanwhile matters had gone hard with the English on Spion Kop. From the moment that our gunners had discovered them, they had bombarded them fiercely. The English perceived too, when it was too late, that they had not been

able in the darkness to find the best shelter, and that they were now insufficiently protected from our shells. These caused such slaughter amongst them that when our storming-party reached the top, before ten o'clock, they met with very little opposition. The English were driven to the other side of the Kop, and the fight was carried on at very close quarters. Boer and Briton were often but fifty yards apart.

And now something happened about which we had heard complaints before, but of which I will now speak for the first and last time: the abuse of the white flag.

When the English had been some time under the withering fire, they hoisted the white flag and held up their hands. Our burghers thereupon ran up to them; but to their intense indignation and abhorrence, when they approached the English they were suddenly subjected to a hot fire.

This so incensed them that when the white flag was hoisted again shortly after, they refused to believe that no treachery was intended, and continued firing for a while even after they saw the white flag flying. But, convinced at last that a genuine surrender was now meant, they ceased their fire and took 187 prisoners.

During this fierce fighting on the Kop, reinforcements were continually being sent up from below to help the British. But these were subjected to a merciless bombardment, at one point especially, where they were particularly exposed. They were cut to pieces by the shells of the quick-firing guns, and mown down by the tiny projectiles of the Maxim-Nordenfeldt.

At the end of this long day darkness closed in, to the relief of all. All except a small number left the top of the Kop, and spent the night against the slopes of the hill with the intention of renewing the bitter contest at the first signs of daylight.

The burghers rose very early the next morning. They were soon in the positions of the former day. But why was all so still? Not an Englishman was to be seen—not even a rifle barrel protruded over the entrenchments of the enemy. Cautiously our men proceeded to the other side of the Kop. The mountain was deserted!

Down below, the entire force of the enemy could be seen retiring towards the Tugela.

The great battle of Spion Kop had been fought. The English had made a second attempt to relieve the besieged at Ladysmith and had a second time been beaten back.

We could not accurately estimate their loss, but hundreds of dead lay on the battlefield.

Generel Buller obtained leave from General Botha to bury his dead; and it was heartrending to see how many there were. Many of them were flung into the long trenches that had served as breastworks, and so great was the number that the earth did not sufficiently cover them all. Some even remained unburied. We did not know what the exact number was, but we saw the dead lying in heaps.

It is unnecessary for me to say here at what number the Boers estimated the strength of the English. The reader can learn the number for himself from British sources when he is perusing these pages.

It is sufficient to state here that their numbers far exceeded those of our men. For we did not have more than 5000 men there at the utmost, and of these all did not take part in the battle; at the same time our loss was great.

On the day after the battle General Burger telegraphed: "Our loss is not exactly known, but must amount to about 120 dead and wounded." The number afterwards proved to be 55 killed, 170 wounded.

We had now a short period of rest, and I got

the opportunity of visiting the Rev. H. F. Schoon, minister of Ladysmith, in Intombi Camp, in which the English had placed the non-combatants, the women, and the sick and wounded. An arrangement had been made with Sir George White to allow burghers, who had leave from their Commandants, to enter this camp to see their friends.

Strange, is it not? It was impossible for such a thing to happen in the later phases of the war. Well, I got leave from Commandant de Villiers to go, and had the pleasure of visiting my friend and his family, and of comforting them in their trouble. They looked pale and weak. I learnt that they got enough to eat, but that the meat was very lean and bad,—other rations were dealt out to them in small doles. I found Mr. Schoon and his family were very quiet and resigned. We could not converse as we should have wished, for a magistrate was present; but I could hear enough to gather that the besieged were in a piteous plight.

On my way to this camp I visited the dam which the Transvaalers were constructing across the stream of the Klip River with the intention of inundating Ladysmith. I saw a great number of Kaffirs there filling thousands of bags with sand, with which to make the dam, which was already level with the surface of the water.

On the 12th of February, General Buller commenced his third attempt to break through. On this occasion he advanced along the Potgieter's Drift road, and tried to force his way through to the south of that road. It was marvellous to see how rapidly the burghers got into position everywhere to oppose the English. The Johannesburg Police suffered very heavy losses. Their position was subjected to such severe bombardment that they could not endure it, and were forced to evacuate it, leaving behind their dead. The English then took

possession of it, but were in turn shelled by our guns, especially by one of the Long Toms; and they speedily relinquished the advantage they had gained.

Here again General Buller's effort was a failure, and he retired south of the Tugela with his whole force.

The following week I went to Harrismith to spend a week with my family, so that I was not on commando when the English broke through at Pieter's Heights and at last relieved Ladysmith. I can therefore say nothing of that, to us, ill-fated battle. I can only say in passing, that the great mistake there seems to have been that General Botha was not in command. When he arrived on the scene at the commencement of the battle, he strongly disapproved of no measures having been taken to prevent the English from taking Klanwane—the wooded ridge to the east of Colenso. "If the English once get on that hill—we have no chance," he said. And what he had said proved true.

The English took the kop and placed their naval guns on it, and they then had the key to Ladysmith. It was then all over with us! From Klanwane they could direct a terrific bombardment on all the Boer positions. And the Boers were overpowered by the overwhelming odds of cannon as well as men.

After besieging Ladysmith for four months, the siege was given up and our forces retired to the north.

The commandos trekked with all speed through the mud—for the weather was rainy: the Transvaalers to the Biggarsberg and the Free Staters to the Drakensberg.

I visited the Harrismith burghers a few days after they had pitched their camp on the great mountain range. What thoughts passed through my heart on thinking how different was our position four months ago when we had descended from those

towering mountains into Natal. During the four that had elapsed we had been very successful, except during the last month, when we began to have disaster on disaster. Cronje had surrendered at Paardeberg. Kimberley, Ladysmith, and Mafeking had been relieved; and just after I arrived in the laager, the report came that Lord Roberts had occupied Bloemfontein without firing a shot. Was this the beginning of the end? I asked myself.

Those were dark days! And yet no one was utterly cast down. "Matters will take a turn," so everyone said; and notwithstanding all that had happened, we looked forward hopefully.

And how much help, too, did not the men receive from their wives. Those who obtained leave to go home for a few days, found their wives as courageous as ever. They found, too, that their womenfolk had performed the labour of men on the farms, while they had been in Natal. They had seen that the fields were ploughed by the Kaffirs, and in many cases they had themselves scattered the seed in the furrows; and now the men would commence to reap what the women had sown, to reap so plentifully that man and beast would live for months upon the harvest.

What noble women are the wives of the Boers! They are the very embodiment of the love of liberty. They have ever been ready to stand by the sides of their husbands, in the holy cause of freedom. In former days they moulded bullets for their husbands, while these were repulsing a fierce onslaught of Kaffirs; and now they had managed the entire farm-work, while the men were absent, fighting for their country. And in the future—alas! that such a future should lie before them—they will have to suffer inexpressible sorrows, because they will choose to be the true-hearted mothers of a free nation. Because of their steadfastness they will have to suffer as the

women of no civilised nation have ever suffered at the hands of the soldiers of another civilised nation. They will refuse to call back their husbands from the heroic strife; and for that they will have to submit to humiliation and insult; for that they will be driven from their homes like cattle; for that they will have to yield their lives in concentration camps; they will have to see their homes burnt, and the food taken out of the mouths of their children, and all this because they have held their Liberty dearer than anything. We knew not then, during those dark days on the Drakensberg, that such a future lay before our women. But we saw enough of their indomitable courage, to know that with such heroines for mothers, wives, sisters, daughters—it was impossible for us to give up the struggle at the first sign of adversity. That was a source of consolation to us in the sorrowful days of March 1900.

PART II.—ENDURANCE

word. This was no doubt due to my having written my journal over several times at Zwart Klip, in the months of January and February 1901.

I shall now proceed to relate what I witnessed during the war subsequent to the events which had happened when I made my last notes in Natal.

When the burghers of the Free State had to retire from Natal, a large number of them were ordered to go as reinforcements to our forces who were endeavouring to prevent Lord Roberts with his immense army from penetrating farther into our country. The burghers, however, of Harrismith, Vrede, and Heilbron, under Chief-Commandant Marthinus Prinsloo, were to remain on the Drakensberg to guard the border. They lay along those mountains from Oliviershoek on the west as far as De Beer's Pass to the east. Subsequently the burghers of Heilbron were also called away; and when General Prinsloo shortly after went away to our commandos in the neighbourhood of Lindley and Senekal, Commandant Hattingh of Vrede was elected Chief-Commandant.

I spent nearly the half of my time in visiting these burghers. On Sundays I held divine service in the church at Harrismith, and on week-days I was in one or other of the laagers on the Drakensberg.

It was very irksome for our burghers to lie there inactive, without ever coming into contact with the enemy; for from Natal the English made no advance.

Our men stood guard day and night, and now and then a patrol went down the mountain; but further than this nothing was done. The spare time was employed in building sod-stables for the horses, and making "yoke-skeys" and handsome walking-sticks from the wood of beautiful trees which were ruthlessly felled in the large forests which grow on the Natal side of the Drakensberg mountains. For the rest the younger men amused themselves with swimming,

cricket, football, and quoits, and so summer glided away into autumn, and autumn into winter.

Sad waste of energy and time, one might say, whilst the other burghers were engaged in a life-and-death struggle in the middle of the State. Undoubtedly so! But the order had been given: Guard the frontier! And as in obeying this command the burghers of Vrede and Harrismith had also the advantage of protecting their own districts, it was by no means against their will that they thus lay inactive from month to month along the border.

But there came a change in this condition of things when, towards the middle of July 1900, an order was issued by the President that all the forces on the Drakensberg mountains should proceed to Nauwpoort.[1] The border guard immediately raised the objection that it was not advisable to remove all the forces from the frontier, and thus leave the only two districts in the Free State—Vrede and Harrismith—that had not yet been devastated, open to invasion from the side of Natal, and unprotected against Kaffir "raids," and they asked the President if he would not change his decision in this matter. After some correspondence, the President agreed that a small body of men should be left as a guard along the border under Mr. Jan Meyer, who for this purpose was appointed Acting Chief-Commandant; but at the same time gave very strict orders that all the

[1] This was the order. When General de Wet passed through Slabbert's Nek, the following arrangement was decided on: General de Wet was to proceed on the 15th to Heilbron, and General Roux the day after to the south of the State. It was further arranged that General Marthinus Prinsloo should remain in command of a small body of men stationed on the Roodebergen from Commando Nek to Nauwpoort in order to guard the grain districts. General Crowther had on the same day as General Roux to go to Witkop and stay there until he could join General Hattingh, under whom he was then to operate in the districts of Vrede and Harrismith. The unfortunate spirit, however, which, immediately after the departure of the President, arose among the officers at Nauwpoort upset all these arrangements.

other burghers should without delay proceed to Nauwpoort.

In accordance with these orders the burghers who had since the month of February been stationed on the Drakensberg, left their positions there on the 16th of July 1900, and two days later, after having made some necessary arrangements at their farms, encamped for the night near Mont Paul, about three miles from Elands River. This force consisted of burghers from Harrismith and Vrede, with one Armstrong and two Krupp guns under command of Chief-Commandant Hattingh, with Mr. C. J. de Villiers as General. Early the following morning they crossed Elands River, and the officers held a council of war on the left bank, during a short halt of the laager, when it was decided to requisition slaughter-cattle and horses from the burghers remaining behind, and some of the men were immediately sent to carry out this resolution. That night we encamped at Klerkespruit, not far from the dwelling of the late M. Jacobsz.

On the following day things began to take a more lively turn. The waggons were inspanned early, and had proceeded to the farm Sebastopol, where, about five o'clock in the afternoon, a report-rider from a position of the Bethlehem Commando at Spits Kop came riding into our laager with the request that reinforcements should immediately be sent by us to Spits Kop, to oppose an English force that had marched out of Bethlehem with the apparent intention of going to Harrismith. General de Villiers was in the vanguard, and immediately sent notice to the Assistant Chief-Commandant, at the same time requesting him to send the guns forward. Hurried preparations were now made to proceed without delay with a body of mounted men, and from time to time other despatch riders arrived, urgently asking that there should be no delay.

At ten o'clock everything was ready, and the men rode out in the raw winter night. We progressed slowly, for the cannon remained far behind, and from time to time we were obliged to wait for them to come up. Everywhere along the road grass fires could be seen, which had been lit by the burghers to warm their feet by whilst they were waiting for the guns to arrive. At last they halted by a hill to the west of Groendraai, and slept there until the moon rose. We proceeded then to near Davelsrust, and whilst the burghers were filling their kettles there, and partaking of an early breakfast, another messenger arrived with the same request as before. The men ate their breakfast hurriedly, and we were soon in the saddle again marching forward with various expectations. When we drew near to the positions of the Bethlehem men, General de Villiers sent forward the Armstrong under Acting Commandant Streydom (Vrede) to Field-Cornet Gideon Blignaut, who was at Spits Kop, whilst he himself with the two Krupp guns went eastwards, against a force of the English on the left bank of Liebenberg's Vlei, on the hills opposite Langberg. When we approached the enemy we occasionally heard the whistle of a bullet, with the peculiar sensation which that sound is apt to cause. But how suddenly did that pass when the roar of our own guns fell on our ears. The fire of our Krupps made the English, at whom they were aimed, scatter; but our gunners had, in their turn, to seek safety behind a ridge, when the little shells of an English Maxim-Nordenfeldt (pom-pom) began bursting rather unpleasantly around them, and driving terror into the artillery horses. They took up a position at the edge of the ridge, opposite the English, not far from the house of Mr. Nicholas Kruger, a little to the east of a small body of Bethlehem men, and from there kept up a desultory rifle fire until the evening.

The following day was Sunday, the 22nd of July. When we awoke it appeared that the enemy had disappeared from the ridge, and about ten o'clock a portion of the burghers were ordered to occupy the deserted positions.

The men were soon there, and a desultory fire was opened from the edge of the ridge to the north-west. After a short time the firing became more severe. The English also brought a Maxim into play, and it seemed as if the fight was going to be a sharper one than that on the previous day. Nothing in the world was the matter; everything, on the contrary, was going satisfactorily, when some officers came riding back from the position to General de Villiers, who was directing the fight from the positions which we had occupied the day before, and told him that the place where the burghers were fighting was untenable. Thereupon the General ordered that they should retire slowly. The burghers who were fighting at the edge of the ridge heard this with much astonishment and disapproval, as they saw no reason for drawing back; but when they noticed that the men on their left were all riding away from their position, they were also obliged to give way. At two o'clock we were back in the positions of the previous day, and the burghers thronged together at a point of vantage to gaze at the positions which had thus been forsaken, filled with dissatisfaction at the desertion.

When they were standing there crowded together, the sound of an approaching shell was heard. It flew just too high, fortunately, over the heads of the throng of burghers, and burst in the kloof behind them. Had it been a little lower it would have worked dreadful havoc. The men dispersed quicker than they had come together, and sought shelter behind the large boulders; and then shell upon shell kept falling till the evening, without, however, doing any damage to man or beast. It had been quite

unnecessary to leave those positions, and it struck me as a bad sign that the burghers were so ready to give way. That evening when we turned in the weather was beautifully mild, but this was the harbinger of calamity! Hardly had we lain down to rest before a drizzling rain set in. At midnight I heard a peculiar sound, as of something soft falling upon the blankets. It was snow! Soon it lay two inches thick upon our blankets. After two hours the rain and the snow ceased, but most of us were wet to the skin; and when on the following day we dried our clothes by the fire, we could speak from experience of having had to sleep in the open air in a snowstorm.

After breakfast General de Villiers crossed Liebenberg's Vlei to reconnoitre the positions of the English from Langberg. On arriving there he saw that the enemy was drawing off in the direction of Spits Kop, whereupon he immediately returned. He then ordered the whole of our force to march in the same direction, to support Assistant Commandant Streydom and Field-Cornet Blignaut. He had just given this order when a report arrived from the latter officer, stating that the enemy had occupied Spits Kop, and asking for reinforcements.

After dark we began marching thither; we proceeded with the utmost silence. No fire was lit along the road; smoking was forbidden. Before daylight we were near the position held by Field-Cornet Blignaut, near the so-called "Schurve Kopje" (rugged hillock). It was then resolved that we should go to the hill between the homesteads of Hans and David Naudé, where we arrived shortly before sunrise. We had not long been there before General Hattingh arrived. He ordered Commandant Truter, with a number of burghers, to return to Liebenberg's Vlei, and to remain there in order to oppose the enemy should they return thither. In the afternoon we saw a large

force of the English approaching along the road that leads over Suiherbosch Plaat. This force was under the command of General Sir H. MacDonald, and had, as we ascertained later on, come from Retief's Nek. The enemy pitched their camp about three or four miles from us, and immediately began to throw out scouts in our direction.

On the following day a council of war was held, and it was resolved to station the burghers as follows:—

The Bethlehem men, under Field-Cornet Blignaut, at Liebenberg's Vlei; the men of Vrede, under Acting Commandant Streydom, at the "Schurve Kopje"; one Field-Cornet at the hill, where the Harrismith men were; and the burghers of Harrismith in the nek of Nauwpoort.

On that same afternoon General de Villiers received a letter from General Roux requesting him to hold Nauwpoort, as it was the intention of the commandos who were on the other side to come through this Pass. The burghers of the various commandos occupied these positions accordingly, and I went to Nauwpoort with the Harrismith burghers.

Next morning General de Villiers expected an attack, and as it was clear to him that the Field-Cornet at the hill between the homesteads of Hans and David Naudé would not be strong enough to stop the English, he sent Field-Cornet Pretorius and Assistant Field-Cornet Jan Jacobsz thither with a number of men, whilst he posted Commandant Truter on a fine ridge on the west of the Pass near the house of Abraham Naudé. He remained at Nauwpoort with the intention of going to the hill himself later on.

We had hardly reached the hill when it became evident that the enemy had some serious intention in mind. They began to move forward, and marched straight for the hill with two field batteries and one

lyddite gun. The force which had taken Spits Kop began at the same time to advance with their guns to "Schurve Kopje."

This had just happened when we saw that the men of the Vrede Commando on the Schurve Kopje were leaving their positions. They certainly had no chance of holding out against the great odds that were advancing on them.

It was now clear to us that we should be in danger of being attacked on our right, if the English who were advancing from Spits Kop should reach the Schurve Kopje, and the prospect was not very cheering. The enemy now began to bombard our positions. The infantry were approaching in extended order. Nearer and nearer they advanced in front as well as on our left.

Our guns, under Sergeant Oosthuizen, did good work, and gave the troops who were advancing on the left a warm reception. Louder and louder roared the English guns, and their shells burst everywhere on and beyond the kop.

General de Villiers rode over to us at one o'clock—just as the fight was at the fiercest. Matters then stood thus: some of the English had already approached so near to our left wing that we were exposed to a cross fire, and others in front were already below the rocky ledges, under cover of which they could get to our rear; moreover, we were in danger of being at any moment bombarded by the guns on the Schurve Kopje, which the enemy had already taken.

For another hour the burghers held their position, and a sharp rifle fire was maintained against the troops on our left flank, especially by Field-Cornet Jan Jacobsz. But when at last it became evident that we should be surrounded if we remained there any longer, the order was given at two o'clock to leave the position. We retired to the west of Mr. Hans

Naudé's house, and halted on the banks of a donga not far from the foot of the Roodebergen.

If we had had no cannon with us, we could immediately have crossed the dongas near the mountains and have gone to the Pass. But there were the guns. They could travel along the waggon road only; and this was now impossible because of the proximity of the enemy. Our plan, therefore, was to remain where we were until it became dark, and then, under cover of the night, to trek to Nauwpoort.

But we had not calculated the probability that the enemy would immediately follow up the advantage they had gained. That is just what they did.

We had not been off-saddled at the donga three-quarters of an hour before our pickets came in to say that the English were following us up. At all costs now we had to push on to the Pass.

Most of the burghers sprang on their horses and rode away without troubling themselves about the guns. They had to be stopped; and General de Villiers asked me to ride forward and try to stop them, whilst he would drag forward the guns as best he could. I succeeded in inducing the men to halt at another ravine, and when the guns arrived there, many of them helped the gunners to get the ordnance across. It was an ugly defile through which vehicles never passed, and we were obliged first to drag across the fore portion of the gun-carriage, and then to fetch the hinder part. This caused great delay, and meanwhile the enemy fired at us with Maxims, though luckily their shots fell short. The one cannon was already across, and the second one nearly saved, when the shrill shriek of the English shrapnel was heard.

And now there was no longer any chance to stop the men. Each went his own way. To add to our troubles, the carriage of the second gun upset and had to be left behind. The gunners removed the breach and rode away.

It was now a case of *Sauve qui peut.* Some took shelter behind the large rocks, others climbed the mountain, whilst others hurried on to the Pass; but all became conspicuous targets before the Roodebergen and the setting sun shining upon them.

I rode towards Nauwpoort, and saw how shell upon shell was fired after our cannon and the swiftly retreating burghers.

Once during the retreat Sergeant Oosthuizen halted, directed his gun, and fired three rounds of shrapnel at the enemy, hitched his horses to again and drove on.

To add to our uneasiness, we saw on approaching the Pass, that the English were advancing on our flank, with the object of cutting us off from the nek; but they were hotly bombarded there by the burghers of Commandant Truter from the ridge on which he was posted, and by a Maxim of Commandant Hasebroek, who had in the meanwhile entered the Pass. This prevented them from attaining their object of heading us off.

When the sun set the majority of those who had retreated in the direction of that Pass had reached Nauwpoort; likewise our rescued gun; and from there it opened fire heavily upon the English. Then the enemy fired some lyddite shells at long range upon us in the Pass. I have never heard anything more awe-inspiring than when those great shells exploded there. Awakening the thousand echoes of the precipitous rocks on both sides of the Pass, they resounded through the narrow defiles of the mountains like mighty thunder-claps. The shades of night fell now, and all was still. Then the gunners, reinforced by a number of burghers, went and fetched the abandoned gun.

And what had we to record as to our loss on the following day after this terrible bombardment?

There had been no loss at all—this was the most marvellous of all that had happened—no loss! This is the strangest of all—no loss of man or beast! Nobody had even been wounded! All—officers and men, were mustered without loss before midday.

CHAPTER II

ON THE BANKS OF THE LITTLE CALEDON

THE officers agreed among themselves that General Hasebroek should remain at Nauwpoort to defend the nek, whilst the men of Harrismith were ordered to go to the footpath near the house of Mr. Willem Bester, in order thus to afford the commandos a chance of coming out from behind the mountains somewhere near Oldenburg or Witzieshoek. We therefore advanced on Friday to the south of the Roodebergen, up along the Little Caledon. How lavishly does Nature reveal her magnificence here. Awe-inspiring mountains rise into the air with every variety of jagged rock, crowning the heights now tinted red by the winter grass. The sharpest contrast of light and shadow strike the eye from the barren masses of sandstone, and the deep, dark ravines. One feels overpowered — everything is so colossal! It is in such a place and in sight of such mountain views that one must feel oneself a stranger and sojourner upon this earth of ours. Ay, a stranger, for one cannot claim as one's possession what Nature so liberally offers.

We rode on with this grandeur all around, and arrived at the farm of Willem Bester shortly after noon. There we off-saddled at a large wheatstack, whilst a number of men were sent as a patrol to the top of the mountain where the footpath crosses. I was lying on the straw with the others, when General Roux arrived there. From him I learnt much that

surprised me, and which by no means served to cheer me. He told me that, after the President and General De Wet had shortly before passed through Slabbert's Nek, the English had broken through there. This had happened in the previous week. And now the enemy had also taken Fouriesburg. There were still burghers in position on this side of that town, but the majority had no intention of fighting any longer. Everything was demoralised. Moreover, nobody knew who was in command: he or General Marthinus Prinsloo. The consequence was that there was no cohesion. Every Commandant acted as he thought fit. Then there were very many who were fleeing with their cattle and waggons, and it seemed as if all those people cared about was how to save their cattle or waggons, or even some little cart. He saw plainly, that as long as there existed such an immense waggon-laager as that which now accompanied the commandos, and as long also as they were encumbered with women and children, nothing could be accomplished. Under these circumstances he considered that, first of all, somebody should be elected who would be acknowledged as Commander-in-Chief. He thought an armistice of six days should be asked of the English in order to enable us to consult our Government. He had convoked a meeting of a Council of War for this purpose, and the officers were to assemble that same night.

We moved up somewhat nearer to the footpath and spent the night at the foot of precipitous mountains in a beautiful kloof. Here we learned that our waggon-laager, for the safety of which we had been uneasy, was still at large and was encamped at Groendraai. That night the officers held a lengthy meeting, and General Marthinus Prinsloo was elected Chief-Commandant. His election was, however, not final, on account of the absence of some of the officers who had still to vote. It was further resolved,

mirabile dictu, by 17 votes against 13, to surrender to the English forces! But the Council of War was undoubtedly startled by this resolution, and immediately brought it under revision, resolving anew that they would ask the enemy for an armistice of six days for the purpose of being enabled to consult with the Government. They further resolved that if this were not to be acceded to by the enemy, a commission of officers should reconnoitre the positions, and if these were found to be untenable, they would then continue fighting in the direction of Witzieshoek with the object of breaking through and passing out of the mountains there. The following day we proceeded. I met the Revs. J. J. T. Marquard, M. Heyns, and P. A. Roux, not far from the house of Mr. W. Bester. They were in no very hopeful mood—a fact which did not tend to cheer me, as the Rev. J. J. T. Marquard, especially, had never been otherwise than buoyant.

I could not remain with them long, because I had to proceed with my commando. What beautiful views of kloof, valley, and mountain presented themselves everywhere! Sometimes an immense rock would rise perpendicularly a thousand feet into the air, from the road along which we were marching. Then we would cross a hill and could look down upon the Little Caledon far below, winding its way through a ravine. How this little stream seemed to soothe and comfort, and soften the weirdness of the grandeur. Now it lay still and calm, caressed by lily and bulrush, where it was for a moment held captive by a ledge of rocks stretching from bank to bank; then again it dashed on as if impatient at being impeded in its course by the great boulders which had fallen into its bed from above. But it was not the rivulet,—it was the mountains that held you spellbound and constrained you to think of nothing else.

How sharp was the contrast between the majestic calm of the eternal mountains and the unrest of the men that swarmed below! Everyone kept pressing on. Forward, ever forward! Whither? No one knew whither; but everybody felt himself enclosed within the mountains, as if in the horrid embrace of a nightmare and his only wish was to escape. To escape! no matter whither! and then? This I asked myself, when we had got beyond these mountains, should we then bravely march against the enemy on the plains? Alas! I saw but few indications of it. Yet could I blame this confused multitude? No, they were as sheep without a shepherd. It was then, if ever, that a *man*—ONE MAN was wanted! Unconsciously the multitude cried for a Leader, and—the Leader did not come!

Long trains of waggons and carts, large herds of cattle and flocks of sheep were driven on with feverish haste. Everywhere one could mark the signs of uneasiness and fear upon the faces of those who were fleeing there. They anxiously inquired of such persons as came from the direction of Fouriesburg or Nauwpoort, where the English were, and whether they might soon be expected.

What grieved me beyond measure was the sight of so many women and children amongst those who were thus endeavouring to escape. Here one might see mothers with babies in their arms, and little ones clinging to their skirts, jumping over the stepping-stones of a river-ford or wading through the water whilst the waggons were struggling across. Yonder again there were others baking bread in ant-hills. Here again you saw girls in scanty clothing, gathering fuel or drawing water, while there was a short halt for the purpose of preparing a meal, and letting the weary oxen rest and graze. Poor women, poor children! Why should they be there?

We rode on, and about noon passed the beautiful

farm "Golden Gate" belonging to Mr. Jan van Reenen. He treated the burghers with great kindness, and gave each one a bundle of forage for his horse.

In the afternoon we proceeded on our journey, and when the sun set we stood upon the mountains that look down upon Oldenburg.

Many a time, when visiting as clergyman of the district the members of my congregation there, I had gazed enrapt on the beautiful view of this fruitful plain surrounded by a circle of lordly mountains; and now again, in spite of melancholy thoughts, the charm of the scene entranced me as I looked a thousand feet down. There many carts and waggons had arrived already, and preparations were being made to pass the night on the spot.

We descended by a steep footpath, and learnt that our waggon-laager had not, as we had feared, fallen into the hands of the enemy. It was at that moment still in safety, at the farm of Mrs. van der Merwe. We off-saddled, and soon the mantle of night hid not only the grand views of mountain and kloof, but also the sad spectacle of panic and confusion.

CHAPTER III

THE UNCONDITIONAL SURRENDER OF GENERAL PRINSLOO

SUNDAY, the 29th July 1900, must stand on record as the saddest day in the history of our struggle. It was on that day that General Marthinus Prinsloo unconditionally surrendered the whole of the forces under him to General Hunter, notwithstanding the fact that at that moment he was not Chief-Commandant according to law. But let me relate in due order what I experienced.

After having held a short service for the men of Harrismith early in the morning of that Sunday, General de Villiers and Piet Maré, member of the Volksraad, addressed them, and General Froneman, who happened to be present, also said a few words. We then passed through the nek to the north of the dwelling of Mr. Salamon Raath, for the purpose of taking up positions against the forces of the enemy under General MacDonald, with whom we had been engaged on the other side of the Roodebergen on the previous Thursday. Those forces had meanwhile moved round by "Davelsrust," with the object of preventing the commandos from escaping at Oldenburg or Witzieshoek.

General de Villiers rode to the house of Mr. Jan Raath to be present at a meeting of officers who had still to vote for the election of a Chief-Commandant. After they had voted, it appeared (so we learnt in the

evening) that General Roux had finally been elected Chief-Commandant!

When General de Villiers, with his Field-Cornet, left for the meeting, he ordered his men to occupy a high hill near the residence of Mr. Jan Raath, and left one of the burghers in command during his absence. His burghers thereupon rode along a ditch on the way to the position, but before reaching it they turned off to the right and eventually halted near the house of Assistant Field-Cornet Jan Jacobsz. Here they slaughtered two oxen and ate and drank, preferring to avoid the enemy to fighting him! I saw how things would go. From the ridge behind us I had seen Platberg in the distance, at the foot of which Harrismith lies, and pointing in the direction of their homes I remarked to someone: "Next Sunday all these burghers will be on their farms."

A peremptory command was sent to the burghers to occupy their positions, but they got no farther than a gully; for the enemy was already in possession of the hill which we should have occupied in the morning, and all we could do now was to fire shrapnel at them. At night there was nothing left for us but to retire to the nek. We little knew then what General Prinsloo had been doing that day.

The following day I was up early, and accompanied Mr. Frans Papenfus to the house of A. Cilliers. There I drank a cup of coffee, and then rode on to Mr. Salamon Raath's. On the way thither a Harrismith burgher asked me if it was true that General Prinsloo had surrendered the whole of our force to the English. This was the first word I heard about the matter. I could, however, not believe that Prinsloo would do such a thing, and laughingly replied that the report was certainly incorrect. But very soon it became evident that what the burgher had heard was only too true. General Marthinus Prinsloo had

indeed surrendered unconditionally to the enemy. A copy of a letter from General Hunter was handed round, in which he gave the assurance, subject to ratification by Lord Roberts, that no private property or personal belongings of the burghers should be touched, and that each burgher would be provided with a horse to the place where he had to give up his arms.

The greatest excitement prevailed. Many abused Prinsloo, and declared that he ought to be shot. This surprised me, not only because I knew what the resolution of the Council of War on the Friday night had been with regard to the surrender, but also because I had been an eye-witness of the state of despondency of the burghers and of their unwillingness to fight. If Prinsloo should be shot, surely other officers deserved the same fate, and many of the burghers as well. So I thought on that sad Monday morning. Later on, however, it became plain to me that, after all, General Prinsloo had to bear the blame. If there had been a victory he would have claimed the honour. Now, the disgrace of the surrender must for ever be associated with his name. Was he not Chief-Commandant, or at least did he not act as such? And is it not the duty of a Chief to instil courage, where such courage is on the wane, and to lead on where no one else would advance of his own accord? The Chief, indeed, should be the best, the most courageous, and the bravest burgher, else anyone might take upon himself the command of an army. Ah! if ever a leader was wanted, the perplexed multitude, shut up as they were within the mountains behind Nauwpoort, had need of one.

Most of the burghers thought they were bound by the resolution of General Prinsloo to submit and to lay down their arms. I thought so too. Why did we have a Commander if, under certain circumstances,

we had to decide for ourselves without recognising him? Unfortunate are the people that in such a case have to decide for themselves. It was my impression that all was lost, at least as far as we who were behind Nauwpoort were concerned. There were, however, others who instinctively judged otherwise about the matter. The shame of surrender while there was a chance of escape by a route running past the dwelling of Salamon Raath seemed to be too great to them, and they declared that they would not lay down their arms.

On the other hand, there were others who, while they did not mind the loss of their independence so much, could simply not bear the thought of being captured, and I heard many say: "I shall not allow myself to be caught by an Englishman." There were also others who were already out of the defiles, and they could not think of returning. And so it happened that a number of burghers under Generals Kolbe and Froneman, and Commandants Olivier, Hasebroek, Visser, van Tonder, Truter, and others, with six guns and some Maxims, immediately moved away in the direction of Harrismith.

In the meanwhile it was said that some persons had been seen with a white flag on the nek to the north of Mr. Salamon Raath's house. General de Villiers went thither, but on the way he was told that they had disappeared.

On his return to his waggons he heard that these persons had been seen at another place.

Two burghers whom he sent to bring them to the laager failed to find them. Instead of returning at once, these two burghers, quite on their own responsibility and without orders, went straight to the English force under General MacDonald, who was then near the house of Jan Raath. The English General received them with the distrust of one who finds men from the army of the enemy coming into his camp

without credentials; but eventually believing their statement, that they had missed meeting his messengers with the white flag, he sent them back with a letter to General de Villiers informing him that General Prinsloo had surrendered together with the whole of the Boer force. He asked General de Villiers to abide by what General Prinsloo had done, and warned him that any movement on his part would be regarded as an "act of war."

While this was taking place, another messenger had been sent in the opposite direction to General Hunter, to obtain further information regarding the surrender. This messenger was met by Commandant Visser, who immediately sent him back with the assurance that General Prinsloo, not being Chief-Commandant, had in this whole matter acted without authority, that the surrender was illegal, and that no one was to consider himself bound by it. General Fourie, who had not yet reached the farm of Salamon Raath, also sent a despatch to the officers requesting that their men should take up positions.

When the men of Harrismith who had not gone out with Commandant Truter heard this, their joy was boundless, for they had been in great doubt as to what they should do; especially after General de Villiers had said during the course of the day that he, being included under the surrender of General Prinsloo, was not an officer any longer, and therefore left it to each burgher to act as he might think fit. Now, however, he again took the command, and ordered the burghers to go into the positions.

With shouts of joy, and singing the "Volkslied," they rode out to occupy the nek. But they got no farther than the house of Salamon Raath, for it appeared that no one else wanted to fight any more. Meanwhile a meeting was held by the officers present, and at that meeting there were Field-Cornets who

said that neither they nor their men would fight any longer, declaring at the same time that the leaders, if they continued the struggle, would be guilty of needless bloodshed.

And so the positions remained unoccupied.

This made everybody there hopeless again, and now it appeared that there was nothing left but to remain there and surrender. General de Villiers called his burghers together, and thanked them for the services they had rendered to the State and for the attachment and kindness shown to his person. I also spoke a few words and declared amongst other things, that I could not believe that it was all over with our South African Cause, but if it were so, then it would be owing to our unwillingness. God would have wished to establish for us our independence, but we should have refused to earn it.

In the course of the day General Roux had ridden in the greatest haste to General Hunter to protest against the surrender of Prinsloo, on the ground of its being illegal: first, because he, and not Prinsloo, was the commanding officer; and secondly, because Prinsloo had in any case not acted in accordance with the resolution taken by the Council of War on Friday night. General Roux, as might have been expected, did not return.

The only two Generals who were beyond the circle of mountains which surround Oldenberg, and who could have proceeded onward, were Generals P. Fourie and C. T. de Villiers. They agreed to remain where they were for that night, not far from the house of Mr. Salamon Raath, in order to ascertain on the following day what General Roux had been able to do; but before dawn of the following day, General de Villiers heard that General Fourie had gone away without saying a word about it.[1]

[1] A week later, when the two men met each other again, General Fourie declared that he had sent someone to tell General de Villiers

Great was the indignation of General de Villiers. He immediately ordered his men to inspan and saddle their horses. We hurried away, and I arrived at Harrismith in the evening, after two of the saddest weeks of my life. How dejected I felt. How sad was my wife. How dark the future seemed to be.

that he was going forward, and that therefore the fault did not lie with him. Speaking to General Fourie, subsequently, I learned that the messenger was sent early in the evening; and I remember that the man did come to us. But the message he brought was a request that General de Villiers should act in accordance with the agreement. This person remained behind, and it may be that he purposely delivered a wrong message in order to induce General de Villiers and his burghers to remain there, and thus swell the numbers of those remaining behind.

CHAPTER IV

TO PRESIDENT STEYN AND GENERAL DE WET

I HAD felt very much discouraged on the farm of Mr. Salamon Raath. There I had thought that all was lost—at any rate as far as the commandos behind Nauwpoort were concerned. There is no doubt that the burghers noticed it in my behaviour, and inferred it from my language.

There was indeed much to cause this melancholy state of mind: the disposition of the burghers to retreat, the discouraging words of some officers, the expressive silence of others; and when we heard at last that matters had reached a climax in the unconditional surrender of General Prinsloo, the *coup de grâce*, so to speak, was given to my hopes.

I of course attached no importance to the braggadocio of those who loudly declared that Prinsloo ought to be shot, while they themselves were the most unwilling to go into positions, or deserted those positions on the bursting of the first shells there. They could not rectify matters by boasting, nor did it give me any assurance of a brighter future. But on the morning after I awoke at Harrismith I felt more sanguine; and it grieved me that I, who had always spoken words of encouragement, should have shown signs of despondency; and I felt now that I ought to stand by those who wanted to continue the struggle, and remain with them till the end, come what may. I recalled also what I had written to the

President not long before, namely, that it was my intention to attach myself to those who would rally round him at the last, if it became necessary. Now, as Olivier, Hasebroek, and others had decided to go to the President and General de Wet in order to be reorganised, I decided to go too. If the struggle had to be given up, let our Government give it up.

In order to carry out this resolution, I rode away from Harrismith early next morning, in order to proceed to Zwart Klip, the farm of General de Villiers, and with him to accompany the commandos that had escaped, in their search for the President and General de Wet. That morning I reached the farm of Mr. Matheus Maré. As, however, the English did not on that day arrive at Harrismith, I returned in the evening to spend another night with my family. But this could not be, for I found there were straggling bands from the commandos in town who were taking horses out of the stables, whether they belonged to friend or enemy; and I saw that if I wanted to make sure of a horse to ride, it would be better not to trust to the chance of finding my horses in the stable at daybreak. Therefore, when de Villiers and some others resolved to leave Harrismith immediately, I determined to do the same and accompany them. So at midnight between the 1st and 2nd of August 1900, I parted from my wife and children, and proceeded to the farm of Mr. Stephanus Schoeman. On the following day I obtained from Mr. Schoeman the loan of a strong pony (on the previous day I had got an excellent horse from Mr. Adriaan Dolebout); and we rode away.

On the way to Zwart Klip we passed the commandos, and heard that English officers had followed the burghers with a white flag, and advised them to surrender. These messengers were sent back with the answer that the burghers had no intention what-

ever of doing any such thing. On the way I met two of our principal men, who had hitherto been amongst the warmest supporters of our cause, but whose names I shall not here record. They were in no very hopeful mood, and it seemed to me that very little was needed to induce them to go and lay down their arms.

This did not tend to cheer me; but I was encouraged somewhat when later in the day I spoke to Jan Jacobsz, Louw Wepener, and others, and noticed how firmly resolved they were to continue the struggle.

On the following day a meeting of Harrismith burghers was held at Molen River bridge. At that meeting it was resolved to send the English Generals a letter informing them that it was our opinion that, for the reasons already stated, we regarded the action of General Marthinus Prinsloo in surrendering himself with the whole of the force as illegal; also that it was our firm resolve to continue the struggle. Further, General de Villiers was enjoined to commandeer the Harrismith burghers anew. This he did that same afternoon, and sent one "commandeer list" with Mr. Jacob van Reenen to Field-Cornet Gert Pretorius, and another with Piet Grabe to Assistant Field-Cornet Johannas Loots. In the evening we heard that the enemy were at Glen Lennie on their way to Harrismith, and that a patrol had already reached the town commonage. We then knew that before the sun would set once more our town would be in possession of the English. There remained, therefore, nothing for us to do but to make the last preparations for taking our departure. Everything was made ready that same evening, and early next morning we proceeded to join the other commandos.

Here it must be noted that there were many in the district of Harrismith who regarded these com-

mandos with the greatest contempt, and who indulged in very strong language regarding them. These commandos were—so they said—very uncontrolled, taking everywhere what they wanted from shops and farms.

It was further alleged that they thought of nothing but running away; and it was argued that this was proved not only by the fact that they had retreated from Nauwpoort, but also by their contriving to avoid the enemy even after they had escaped from the mountains.

This was the excuse which many of the burghers of Harrismith gave for surrendering a few days later. They were, they declared, unwilling to accompany and act with a band of robbers; and thought it better to lay down their arms immediately than to carry, and not fight with them.

The answer to this is not far to seek. That the commandos were demoralised was evident; no one with his eyes open could doubt this. But now they went to their President and Commander-in-Chief! Why? Was it not for the sole and only purpose of getting breathing-time?—to get reorganised? And was it not therefore the duty of everyone to join those who were going to the Government for that purpose? Surely no burgher had the right to turn his back upon his Government, whilst it was still in existence, and whilst the road by which to reach it remained open.—By not doing this they made themselves guilty of desertion.

This weighed heavily with me, and although I saw much in the burghers that I most strongly disapproved of, and although I had myself not yet wholly regained my former hopefulness, I could not regard the matter from any other point of view than that, so long as the President had not surrendered, I could not do so either, and that it was my duty to stay with those who did not intend doing so. And

thus it occurred that I began a journey, which was to last twenty-one months, on Saturday, the 4th of August 1900.

I was one of a small company of which General de Villiers was the chief person. He did not at that juncture enjoy a very high reputation, because there was no lack of persons who declared that he had not acted in good faith at Nauwpoort, and that he had been in league with the enemy. I was convinced of the contrary, and remained in his company. I had enjoyed his hospitality when all went well with him, and now I would not desert him when his sky had become clouded.

We reached the commandos at Gwarri Kop, near Cornelius River, and we learnt there that messengers from the British had again come to insist upon our surrender.

How much trouble did the Generals to whom Prinsloo had surrendered not take to induce us to desert! What noble work it was for warriors to do! If the English had succeeded in this the war would have been brought to an end, without their having the trouble of fighting any more. But what would Lord Roberts have thought of it if our positions could have been reversed, and if we had sent messenger upon messenger to his discouraged and weary subordinates and soldiers to persuade them to be unfaithful to their country and their flag? Our leaders were steadfast, and sent the English officers back with the message, that not only had we no intention of surrendering, but that we also did not wish to receive any more messengers with similar proposals.

The following day, being Sunday, I held a service in the house of Mr. David de Villiers, at Holspruit, and then rode to the commando to see if I could be of any use there. But that faithful Free Stater, the student MacDonald, was just busy holding service. I

was greatly edified and comforted by his interpretation of the words, "I will lift mine eyes to the hills from whence cometh my help!"

During the week we heard from our President. His letter was in answer to a report, despatched immediately after the Nauwpoort affair, informing him of the state of affairs. He expressed himself deeply grieved at the surrender, and appointed General P. Fourie as Acting Chief-Commandant. He also mentioned that many burghers had taken up arms again, and urged us to come to him as speedily as possible. A few days after this, Judge Hertzog came to us. He said that he had been sent to lead us to the President and the Chief-Commandant, and brought us the latest news from the Transvaal.

We now travelled a long distance every night, halting during the day. Our way of "trekking" was to begin at nightfall and to continue till about midnight or two o'clock in the morning, and then to tie the oxen to the yokes and hobble the horses. This "trekking" was not pleasant; for the weather continued bitterly cold, and to remain in the saddle almost the whole night with icy cold feet was certainly not enjoyable. But it had to be done, and no one grumbled.

Our laager was by no means perfect, as may well be imagined. We consisted of small numbers from almost every district of the Orange Free State, and were not used to each other. Moreover, there were too many officers. There were generals without commandants, and commandants with hardly any men. Under these circumstances one can well understand that there existed but little cohesion amongst us, and that the burghers committed excesses of which they would not have been guilty had the laager consisted solely of burghers from one district. It thus happened that some wasted their ammunition by firing it away at game, and through

carelessness the veld was set on fire almost daily. This continued until by stringent measures and heavy fines the delinquents were deterred. One instance of a sad veld fire occurred on the 11th of August. It began at a spot where a camp-fire had been lit, and might have resulted in the destruction of a large portion of the laager. It was quite calm when we rose that morning, but soon the wind began to blow. The storm raged more and more fiercely, and somebody said that if no order were given to put out all fires in the laager there was danger for the veld. This had hardly been said when someone shouted, "The veld is on fire!" Everything was now in commotion to leeward of the wind. Tents were pulled down, and the burghers hurriedly removed their saddles, bedding, and whatever they could, across the road to a place of safety. Some dragged the waggons by hand out of danger, and others ran about with sacks to extinguish the fire; but all did not assist in the attempt to extinguish the flames—only those who were in danger—the others looked on at the fire with colossal indifference, and went on roasting their meat or doing whatever they were busy with, as if there was no danger at the other end of the laager. But how great was the danger there! Each burgher redoubled his energies and did his utmost. All, however, would have been in vain, and a portion of the laager would inevitably have been destroyed if there had not fortunately been a narrow road between us and the fire. Besides, by a lucky chance there was the hide of an ox which had been slaughtered that morning. This was dragged across the fire, and wherever it was drawn it extinguished the flames; and in this way the laager was saved from destruction. But it was just as impossible to stop the conflagration as it is to stem the strong current of a river in flood. The flames sped onward, and soon all the veld to the

east was black. Subsequently we heard of great damage done by this fire, and that lives had even been lost. What mischief had we not done by our unpardonable carelessness,—and we had always taken it so much amiss when the British troops had set fire to the veld!

The wind continued blowing all day, but died away in the evening. We then inspanned according to custom, and "trekked" onward to the banks of the spruit named Klip River, six miles east of Heilbron.

We now hoped to reach the laager of General de Wet shortly, as it had been in the vicinity of this town when Judge Hertzog had left it.

The following day, being Sunday, Mr. MacDonald and I held religious services in different parts of the laager.

We learnt in the course of the day that a considerable force of British was barring our way. This forced us to draw back some distance. We proceeded far into the night, and on Monday morning we were just as far south of Heilbron as we had been east the day before. It then began to seem doubtful if we should meet the President and General de Wet as speedily as we had hoped, not only because the English were in our front, but also because our scouts told us that we might expect a British force in our rear, coming with the road from Bethlehem towards Heilbron. Messages were, however, sent to General de Wet, and from him also tidings were received from time to time.

On the following day, Tuesday, 14th of August, it appeared that we should come in contact with the enemy. The force which was marching along the road from Bethlehem to Heilbron was coming nearer and nearer, and we came in collision with it not far from Vecht Kop of "voortrekker" fame, where Sarel Celliers had frustrated the Matabeles in 1837 in their attempt to take his laager.

The British trekked along between the ridges, where our men had taken up positions, and this kop. At twelve o'clock our guns opened fire on the enemy, which was fiercely responded to by the English cannon. Our burghers held the positions they occupied till late in the afternoon; but when the enemy's infantry advanced in strong force from the front, and the burghers, who held a position on a pointed hillock to the right, gave way, the men who fought in the centre were forced to retire. They did this under a hail of bullets, and it is a miracle that many were not killed. Only one was wounded there; but altogether we lost three dead and seven wounded on that day.

We were not elated over this result, but according to what we heard a month later, the loss of the English was greater than ours. It appeared that the enemy's purpose was to reach Heilbron, for we were not pursued, and after dark we proceeded in a south-westerly direction.

It now speedily became evident that we should not reach the President for some time. Word had come that he and General de Wet had taken refuge in the Transvaal, and that they were being pursued by an enormous force.

Our officers decided to act according to circumstances: to oppose the enemy wherever it was practicable, or to retire whenever we were forced to do so; but in all cases steadfastly to remain under arms. We had done our utmost to reach our President and Chief-Commandant, and had failed. But the short time of respite which had elapsed since the affair at Nauwpoort had exerted a beneficial influence on all, for we were now more and more convinced that, whether we reached the Chief of our State or not, surrender was not to be thought of as long as our Government existed.

CHAPTER V

WANDERING

OUR trek to Heilbron had borne good fruit, not only in that it had freed us from the baneful influence which the surrender at Nauwpoort had caused, but we had also learned to know each other better. The heterogeneous elements of the laager became more and more homogeneous. It seemed quite natural that there should be one man in command. At his bidding we trekked, and at his command we halted. By degrees we became used to discipline, a clear proof of which was the fact that no one fired unnecessary shots, or set the veld on fire.

From Vecht Kop we trekked in a south-westerly direction. We pursued this course the whole week till we got near Ventersburg, keeping about eighteen miles away from the railway line. How endless these night marches in the depth of winter seemed. The waggons that brought up the rear seldom reached the camping-place before two or three o'clock in the morning. The least delay in front affected each vehicle in the rear. When a ford was reached a halt was called to see how things looked there, and then the whole trek behind was kept waiting, and in this manner from two to five minutes were always lost. The next waggon then reached the ford, and the same thing was done over again. Again the waggons behind had to wait, with a similar loss of time. When a waggon got stuck the delay was even longer. Then, in addition, a fearful commotion arose. There

was dreadful shouting and yelling before the Kaffirs could convince the oxen that they had to get the waggon out by hook or by crook.

This slow progress was inexpressibly tedious, and we resorted to all sorts of contrivances to beguile the time. I sometimes would ride on ahead, and then with my horse's bridle over my arm would sit or lie down on the grass till the last waggon had passed, when I would again ride on and wait; or else I would walk leading my horse, in order to warm my feet. In this manner the time passed till, to my delight, I saw lights in the distance, which proved to me that a portion of the laager had already reached the halting-place. When at last I arrived there, a piece of meat was half-broiled on the coals and heartily relished. How it looked, and how much of the ashes adhered to it, could not be seen in the dark; but this made no difference, for the long trek in the cold winter night had sharpened our appetites.

During this week we crossed Rhenoster River, and one morning at two o'clock we arrived at Doornkloof. Later in the day I had the pleasure of visiting the farm of that stalwart "voortrekker," Sarel Cellier. Thirty years before I had as a boy met him there alive and well. It was a pleasure to me now to be able to pass a short time there with his widow. But it struck me painfully how troublesome the burghers were to the women on the farms. The house was constantly so full that there was no place for everyone to sit down. They were continually going and coming, and asking for this and that. "Has Tante (Aunt) any dried fruit for sale?" "Do bake for me; I will give you the flour." "Auntie can make bread or vetkoek (dampers) of it, just as you think fit." "Can't Auntie have my clothes washed?" When I heard this I said, "My dear man, do as I do —wash your own clothes." And yet how could I blame others for being troublesome when I had on

one occasion got a loaf of bread from that house myself? I feel, however, that I need not plead guilty, for I very seldom went into the houses. Sometimes, as on this occasion, I went to see acquaintances. At other times the occupants of the house had heard that I was in the laager and invited me into the house. But as a rule I did not go to farms.

When we were at Doornkloof the question persistently presented itself to me: Where in the world *are* we going to? for we did nothing but wander from one place to another; so at least it seemed to me. I made a note in my diary to the following effect: "Not with levity nor irreverently do I call to mind the first words of the hymn—Whither, pilgrims, whither go ye?" We turn to the north and then to the south and—

"You are running away!"

Very well, we *were* running away, if you wish. What of that? Don't we keep the war going in this way? The English imagine they have conquered us. This is far from being the fact. They have occupied the towns, but they are not in possession of the country. They have annexed the Republic, but not the people. Their troops march out in overwhelming numbers wherever they wish, east and west, from one town to another, and we cannot prevent them, but we remain in the field nevertheless; we are still free. We turn to the right and to the left, and our adversary is not able with all his cannon to prevent it. In this way we keep the war going, and increase the expenditure day by day. In this way we worry our adversary; and thus we hope—the weak against the strong, like the widow and the unjust judge in the parable—to force the stronger to yield to our importunity. In the evening we trekked as usual; late at night we crossed the bridge over the Valsch River.

On the following day a sad duty fell to my lot. A Kaffir had for the rape of a white girl been condemned

to death by the Council of War, and I was called upon to prepare him for death. During all my professional duties I had never had the spiritual charge of a man condemned to death. Although he deserved his sentence, in my opinion more even than if he had been guilty of murder, I could only regard him in this his last hour as a fellow-man. All sense of condemnation was effaced, only pity remained—pity for his total helplessness. Although he acknowledged that he deserved death, he asked me if I could do nothing to obtain his pardon; and when I told him there was no hope, he still kept urging me to try and move the officers to inflict some other punishment. As a mouse in the claws of a cat struggles in vain to get free and yet continues struggling, so he, hoping against hope, struggled against the inexorable.

Could he not be released? At length he resigned himself. I spoke to him of Jesus and prayed with him. After a short time he was led away to his grave, and standing in it he laid his hand on my shoulder and repeated the words of a prayer after me. I hurried away from the spot, but before I reached the laager a volley announced that all was over in this world with that human being.

The following day was Sunday. We were not far from Ventersburg. Shortly after divine service some burghers went out against a patrol of the enemy, cornered them in a kraal and took twenty-four of them prisoners. Amongst them were some officers and one person who claimed to be a doctor. As, however, he was found armed, he was held prisoner along with the rest. We had not yet commenced our evening trek, when I received from someone a note written by the Rev. R. H. Daneel, informing me that my wife had gone to Maritzburg to my parents.

This was a comfort to me, for I had always been uneasy about her. I subsequently found that the English had turned her out of the parsonage and put

her over the border. On Monday evening after sunset we again proceeded. It was a miserably long trek. A delay occurred at a ford, and it was half-past three in the morning before we arrived at the outspan, which the foremost waggons had reached at twelve o'clock. Before we could lie down to rest it was already half-past four, and the morning star was shining on the eastern horizon. A trek or two more brought us to Doornberg, and Commandant Hasebroek went with a number of men to Ventersburg. He found the town empty,—that is to say, there were no troops there,—and he levied his usual tribute on the shopkeepers of coffee, sugar, meal, and other provisions.

CHAPTER VI

WHAT HAPPENED NEAR WINBURG AND AT LADYBRAND

WHEN we had been at Doornberg for one day the Vrede Commando arrived and joined us. We now became a comparatively strong force, consisting of about 2000 men.

On the following day some men were sent from each of the commandos to assist Commandant Hasebroek, who had since the previous day been engaging about 150 of the English. These English had marched out of Winburg with two Maxims, and had taken up a position at the house of Mr. le Roux, not far from Doornberg towards the south-west.

Without being ordered, a large number of burghers left the laager on the following day to go and join the fight; and when I with several others arrived at the house of General Andries Cronje, I met numbers of them returning. They said there were already too many engaged against the English at le Roux's farm, and that they had been ordered to proceed to the Ventersburg road to oppose a possible reinforcement from that village, which had meanwhile been re-occupied by the enemy. As had been suspected, a number of the enemy had in reality advanced from that direction to help their friends, but they turned back when they saw our men, not, however, without burning down some houses on their way. From the east the burghers of Vrede also made their appearance, and pursued these troops; but when the enemy began

to fire shrapnel at them, they ceased the pursuit and returned to the laager.

The English on the farm of le Roux had meanwhile been harassed by our men during the whole day both in a poplar-grove and around the farmhouse. We had two guns and a Maxim there, and with these they were bombarded continually. They were also within reach of our rifles. Our men approached the enemy in some cases to within three hundred yards, and so it came about that on our side four were killed and seven wounded. In the evening the matter was given up, and all our men retired to Laaispruit. Commandant Hasebroek had treated our burghers very kindly, and his house was not far from where the fight took place, and there his wife had provided many with food and a cup of coffee. Every burgher was full of praise for him.

The following day was Sunday, the 26th of August. Divine service was held at several places; and at nightfall 800 men marched out, with the object of taking Winburg, whilst the laager proceeded a little towards the south.

Commandant Hasebroek sent one of his sons to guide the burghers, whilst he marched on the town from another direction. Unfortunately these men delayed too long at a place where they went to sleep for a while. They arrived at their destination when it was already broad daylight. This was the reason that the whole thing turned out a miserable failure. On this account also the guns could not be properly posted. As was to be foreseen, our men were expected by the English, who were in good positions; and it frequently happened that our men were nearly surrounded, and had to retire. Here General Olivier was captured. He rode into a party of the enemy, and so little was he aware how matters stood that he took them for our people.

"Hands up!" they cried.

He laughed, thinking it a joke on the part of his own men. But it was no joke, and Commandant Olivier had to lay down his arms. Commandant van Tonder was with him, and was already disarmed, when he set spurs to his horse and raced away. A bullet cut through his sleeve, but he escaped to tell of the sad occurrence. The burghers returned in confusion to the laager, followed by small numbers of the enemy. The whole affair was a fiasco, and Winburg was not taken.

The enemy could do no more than drive our men back to the laager; but they avenged themselves for what had taken place at le Roux's farm, by burning down Commandant Hasebroek's house.

When we started in the afternoon clouds were rising in the west, and the thunder rolled. No rain, however, fell, but it was a sign that the worst of the cold weather was past and that spring had come. The sky remained clouded, and two days later, when we approached the little Vet River, it rained hard and continuously. The ground was soaked, and two months later, when we came along there as a mounted commando, we could still see the tracks our waggons now made in the mud.

During this week some waggons loaded with meal, coffee, sugar, sweets, and brandy were captured by our men. On the banks of the little Vet River the different articles were distributed to the men. Some Commandants acted, with regard to the brandy, in a sensible manner; others, not. In one instance the men drank immoderately, dipping pannikins into buckets which had been filled with brandy. General Fourie came upon one sad spectacle of drunkenness, and there and then poured all the liquor on the ground.

On Friday evening we had advanced as far as Allandale. Here it was resolved to rest a while, and a committee of officers went on ahead to select a

suitable place at the foot of Korannaberg where the several commandos might encamp. On Saturday morning each commando went to the spot assigned it. How pleasant it was to trek onward after the rain. The showers had already had effect upon the veld, and the tender blades of grass were making their appearance. Everywhere one saw signs that Nature had once more awakened from her winter sleep, and it was delightful to gaze on the fresh green, on the branches of the willows and the soft pink of the peach blossoms. And irresistibly our hearts too were filled with a strong desire that thus too, after the winter of our discontent, the national life of our poor people might once more revive.

We were all encamped somewhat to the west of Korannaberg, and rejoiced at the thought that we, for a time at least, would no longer have to undertake endless night marches. But these pleasant thoughts could not be indulged in by all. Already some burghers out of every commando had been ordered to proceed that very evening with General Fourie to Ladybrand, for the purpose of taking that town.

Early on the 2nd September, after having ridden the whole night, the burghers attacked Ladybrand. The troops lying in garrison there immediately retreated to Lelyhoek, a beautifully cultivated rocky kloof near to the town. Without delay a heavy bombardment was opened upon the English, and kept up through the whole of the day with the two guns which General Fourie had taken with him. At nine o'clock General Visser was already inside the town—being the first of our officers who entered it, and at eleven o'clock some of our men captured horses and cattle and stormed the enemy to within six hundred yards. Somewhat later on twelve men advanced to within a few yards of the positions of the English; but had to retire not only on account of the enemy's severe fire, but also because

some Krupp shells were being fired at them by our own gunners, who mistook them for English. During the day positions on all sides were taken up nearer to the enemy, behind the rocks above Lelyhoek, and behind the stone walls of the gardens in the town. A continual fire was kept up on both sides. The English also kept firing without intermission into the town, and some of us were hit there. Amongst others, one burgher was killed in the street near to the church. At nightfall the enemy had been driven out of Lelyhoek, and had sought shelter amongst the rocks a little higher up.

The same kind of fighting was kept up on Monday and Tuesday. A perpetual sound of rifle firing filled the air, overpowered every now and then by the roar of a Krupp shell that would make the rocks re-echo somewhere in Lelyhoek.

I arrived on the scene on the evening of the third day, and then I learnt that everything had to be abandoned, and that our people were preparing to retire at eight o'clock; the enemy might be forced to surrender within two or three days, but this could not occur before the arrival of a reinforcement which was advancing from Newberry's Mill. It was also feared that assistance might come from Ficksburg. I had therefore only an hour and a half at my disposal to visit my brother-in-law and his family. I walked quickly to the parsonage, got some information there regarding my wife, and then left the town along with the burghers.

Although the English garrison was not forced to surrender, our men had taken the town, and held it for three days. Our wants also had been provided for. As much clothing and food had been taken out of the town as could be carried away, and although General Fourie could not return completely victorious, he had no reason to be dissatisfied with the result of his expedition. We had, during the three days, to

lament the loss of four killed and five wounded. What the English loss was we could not learn.

Well satisfied, we returned to the laager; but yet there was one thing that displeased me: it was that goods belonging to private persons had been taken. Of course, I do not refer to what was taken by the Government as the lawful prize of war; but to the spiders and horses belonging to individuals taken in the town. My feeling on this matter was so strong that I considered it my duty two days later, when a Council of War was held, to request the officers to see to it that their own resolutions and orders concerning this should be carried out.

CHAPTER VII

THE TREK FROM KORANNABERG TO GENERAL DE WET

WE had heard from General de Wet. This was the reason for the meeting of officers two days after the taking of Ladybrand. General de Wet had ordered that the Harrismith Commando should proceed between Kroonstad and Rhenoster River, and should be employed along the railway line in interrupting the communications of the enemy, whilst the burghers of Vrede were to go to him—but without encumbering themselves with their waggons, and that the other commandos were to proceed farther west, everywhere taking the towns and appointing magistrates.

On Saturday, the 8th of September, we separated. From Commandant Hasebroek we parted at Koranna-berg, whilst General Fourie hastened forward with 100 men to interview General de Wet personally. The order of General de Wet was not carried out by the men of Vrede and Harrismith. They considered that they could not do away with their waggons; but nevertheless resolved to proceed to the Chief-Commandant, and then, when they should arrive where he was, to act according to circumstances.

It was one of the most monotonous journeys imaginable. We were under the command of General Hattingh as Acting Chief-Commandant, and from the 8th to the 18th of September we did nothing but trek some distance every evening. We never travelled

and several of them were killed, wounded, and captured.

We now proceeded on our way in peace—unmolested by the English. We again crossed Valsch River, but this time somewhat farther up the stream. Leaving Lindley to the east, we passed through Rhenoster River by the same ford through which we had passed a little more than a month before when going south. The nearer we approached to where we hoped to meet General de Wet somewhere in the Heilbron district, the more fervently we longed to see him. Everybody thought that the Chief-Commandant would put everything right, and the days that intervened before we should see him seemed to pass all too slowly. At last (22nd September, Saturday) Vecht Kop came into view. In passing we gazed at it with varied emotions, for we seemed to see the laager of Sarel Celliers there, surrounded by Moselekatze's hordes. We seemed to hear their battle-cry and their fierce assault; we witnessed their repulse and the deliverance of the little laager. Then Vecht Kop disappeared behind us, and other thoughts swayed us as we rode over the positions where the fight of August 14 had taken place.

In the evening we outspanned on the farm of Petrus Schoeman and halted for the night, expecting to hear from General de Wet every moment. The following day was passed as usual, and at three o'clock the General rode into the laager. At five o'clock the burghers assembled to be addressed by the man whom all had longed so much to see since the unfortunate affairs at Nauwpoort. The officers presented him with an address, with which, however, he was not particularly pleased, saying that he was not very partial to addresses.

He then spoke to the burghers in his pleasant, clear, and pithy manner. He said that it was his firm conviction that God would help us, and would not

allow us to disappear as a nation. But this belief should not make us careless; on the contrary, this conviction should be a spur to every man to do his share of the work. Every man should do his duty, which consisted in this, that each one should be prepared to sacrifice his all on the altar of Liberty: money, goods, comfort, life! As we were weak and our adversaries strong, the best way of fulfilling our duty would be to keep harassing them. This we should do by making provisions at Pretoria and Johannesburg dear, through continually interrupting their communications. Further, the waggons should be done away with—done away with immediately, and the burghers were to form separate mounted commandos. He then related to us some of his experiences when he was pursued by large British columns from Slabbert's Nek up to the bush veld, and how matters stood in the Transvaal, and what had taken place at the battle of Machadodorp. This address was listened to with rapt attention, but it soon became apparent that most of the men had not heard what they had wanted to hear.

On the following day a Council of War was held, General de Wet presiding, and his proposition concerning the abolition of the waggons, and of commandos acting independently, was accepted. In the afternoon the Commandants called their men together and made known to them what had been decided upon, at the same time commanding the burghers to free themselves from the encumbrance of their waggons immediately; and as to the Harrismith men —we, together with the Kroonstad burghers, were told to employ ourselves by breaking up the railroad and to interrupt the trains between Rhenoster and Sand River, our commanding officer was to be General Philip R. Botha.

One could immediately perceive by the grumbling in the laager with what dissatisfaction the commands

so late into the night as when we were going to Korannaberg, and, excepting that nothing occurred to afford an agreeable variety, the life was not an unpleasant one. One can understand that every excuse was seized for the enjoyment of some diversity, and so it happened that a most decided breach of discipline took place of firing shots contrary to the established rule of the commandos. The temptation came in the shape of "wilde beests" (gnus). One afternoon we reached a part of the country where that kind of game still existed in considerable numbers, and the temptation was more than some could resist. Wilde beests! those were animals about which our fathers had so often told us, and which the majority of us had never seen! Regardless, therefore, of the safety of the commando on the march some of the burghers fired at the game. The reports of the rifles frightened the horses, which had by now become frisky after the rest at Korannaberg, and the young grass they had eaten. Some of them broke loose, and bolted across the broad level plains, whither the owners pursued them like madmen. How angry they were with the delinquents! But it probably gave them some satisfaction when the officers, some days after, punished this transgression with a fine.

Proceeding on our way, we first heard that the enemy had hemmed in Commandant Hasebroek at Doornberg, and afterwards that he had escaped with the loss of nearly all his waggons and his field-guns. We heard later on that the enemy had been in strong force under General Hector MacDonald, and that Commandant Hasebroek escaped with all his men, but that General MacDonald had captured sixteen of his waggons at Vet River on the 13th, and eighteen at Doornberg on the 17th of September. The cannon, however, did not fall into the hands of the enemy. Commandant Hasebroek concealed them in a dam so as not to have the trouble of dragging about with him

guns for which he had no ammunition. On Sunday, the 16th of September, we were not far south-west of Senekal. From there we trekked nearer to the town and then northwards; we crossed through Sand River and camped at Bretsberg. On the previous day several of the burghers had gone to the town, and many others intended doing so next day, in order to purchase what they required. But before they could do so, we heard that the English had entered the town from the direction of Zuringkrans, so suddenly that no one was aware of their approach. The men who were there escaped at the opposite end of the town just in the nick of time, and reported to us what had occurred. The laager had now to inspan hurriedly and trek, while a number of burghers hastened away in the direction of the town to oppose the English should they advance. The British fired from the forts at Senekal, and their shells burst on a ridge along which the laager was trekking out of town.

Great was the indignation at the want of vigilance displayed by the scouting corps in allowing the enemy to approach and take Senekal without being noticed; but after the captain had given an explanation, the council of war was satisfied and acquitted the corps of all blame. The enemy did no more than hurl shells at us, and we went our way unharmed.

On the 18th of September we had advanced to Modderfontein, where we were just twenty-four miles from Senekal, Ventersburg, Kroonstad, and Lindley respectively. An unpleasant surprise awaited us here. Early the following morning we heard rifle firing and the dud—dud—dud of a Maxim-Nordenfeldt, both directed against the scouting corps. The laager again trekked in great haste, while the burghers went to meet the enemy. Unfortunately the issue was not favourable as far as our losses were concerned, for two of our men were killed and three were wounded. The advance of the enemy was, however, stopped,

CHAPTER VIII

OUR EXPERIENCES AS A MOUNTED COMMANDO

IT was on Tuesday, 25th of September, that we commenced our work as a mounted force. We rode on until we reached the farm where we had listened to the address of General de Wet. The enemy almost immediately drew our attention. On the other side of the hillock, of which I spoke in connection with the fight on the 14th of August, and on this side of Vecht Kop, a small English force were marching along the main road to Heilbron.

We occupied positions on this little hill and on the ridges to the south-west of it, whence we could see the English. After a while they halted in a hollow, and our cannon opened fire on them. Some confusion ensued, and several minutes elapsed before the English guns were brought into action and began firing on our Krupps. The odds were then too heavy, and our gunners were unable to continue the fight. They were obliged to remove the Krupp out of danger, and before nightfall all the positions were deserted. We halted for the night without off-saddling our horses, on the slopes of a ridge not far from Heilbron, and went early next morning where we expected the English to come along.

We reached a ridge, behind which the English were, but no one seemed inclined to take possession of it, as none knew what it looked like on the other side. General Philip Botha was not with us yet, and

the officers who were with us did not lead the men up. They remained below merely urging them on. "Charge, you young fellows!" they cried; but as example is better than precept, they spoke in vain. Only about twenty-five men obeyed.

When these brave fellows gained the top, they opened fire on some British cavalry who had nearly reached the crest of the ridge, and forced them to retreat. They also forced the gunners of an Armstrong to abandon it. But at a distance of eight hundred yards there was another gun, and somewhat farther a Maxim-Nordenfeldt. There was a slight pause. Then the English began from there to bombard our men, and the shells fell not only on the ridge but also on the commando at the back. The brave twenty-five had to retire from the ridge, and the commando was scattered, retreating in confusion past the south of Heilbron, with shrapnel bursting right and left of them. A small number of burghers still made an effort to hold a kopje, but they were driven from it by the shells of the Maxim-Nordenfeldt. Wherever a horseman or a burgher was seen there the shells burst, and so the English paved their way to Heilbron, which they entered before noon. We came to a standstill at Klip River to the east of Heilbron. But not all the burghers stopped there, for so discouraged were a few that they rode away to their farms. General de Wet, who arrived on the scene after the fight, was very indignant about this, and immediately sent some burghers to compel them to return.

And here sat our party—there were five of us, General C. J. de Villiers, his son Christian, Andries Pretorius, my son, and I. Our party, I say, sat by a brook that was honoured by the name of river, and thought of our troubles. We thought also of the demands of Nature, and began to prepare some food. Whatever we might have to eat would be relished,

sometimes, as I sat on horseback, as if the broad brim of my hat were the roof of a big tent, of which, as sometimes happens when the weather is warm, the sides had been lifted, and that the burghers in front of me were moving on under its roof with a rhythmic motion. I had every now and then to look up to the stars in order to shake off the illusion. We had to wait now and then for those who lagged behind, and then we would throw ourselves on the ground and immediately fall asleep. How fortunate those people must be who have such strong constitutions that they can endure everything without sleep, and apparently never suffer from fatigue. There were such amongst us now. They were ever on the alert and woke up the slumbering ones when it was time to proceed again. Things went thus till daylight broke, when we crossed first the branch line from Wolvehoek to Heilbron, and then the main line. Some of our scouts paid a visit to an English guard and disarmed them.

We had thus fortunately got across the line with all our belongings—all except one or two waggons; among these an ammunition waggon remained behind. When the drivers came near the railway an armoured train had made its appearance, and so they had to turn back. Out of this train fire was opened on those who had already crossed, but no casualty occurred. But I had lost all my clothes. To spare my horses I had placed my little all on the ammunition waggon which remained behind, and now I had nothing more than what I had on and what was in my saddle-bag.

After we had been off-saddled for a while, General de Wet proceeded to Vredefort with his bodyguard. He invited me to accompany him, and I had the pleasure of being in his company for three hours. I asked myself, as I rode by his side, what could be the secret of his power? and it appeared to me that it lay in this—that while he was friendly to all, he was

intimate with none. Moreover, as is the case with all great leaders of men, he was as reticent as the Sphinx.

In the afternoon we reached Vredefort. How pleasant it was to me to find myself once more in the house of a brother minister, between the four walls of his study, and to forget for a while the blue canopy of the skies above and the hills and dales below.

CHAPTER IX

ON THE WIDE PLAINS

YES, I did enjoy it! To spend twenty-four hours in a house, for since the 2nd of August I had never slept under a roof. What luxury!—a soft bed and a bath in the morning. But how numerous are the demands of civilisation! I had of course to breakfast with the family, and there the table was laid with snowy linen and neatly folded serviettes.

Ah me! How did I behave after having had to manage with my clasp-knife on the grass for so long? Still, it charmed me. The old instinct again awoke. A fork was better after all than one's fingers, and sitting on a chair in the study than on an anthill in the veld. The transformation took place with lightning rapidity. I was myself again. This was my world. Out yonder I was a stranger, but here I was at home; and it was like being rent from a part of myself when at three o'clock I once more joined the commando.

We proceeded between the kopjes that surround Vredefort on the north-west. There beautiful scenery and the scent of the thorn-tree blossoms repaid me in some measure for the comforts I had to relinquish beneath the roof of the Rev. J. A. Joubert. But when at evening the hills and thorn-trees lay behind us on the horizon, and we had to lie down to rest by a dam on particularly large tufts of grass, I could well realise that something indeed had been

sacrificed for the great cause of liberty and independence.

Here on the following morning General de Wet called the burghers together and read to them a notice which he had issued for the information of the enemy. This notice was to the effect that where troops were caught in the act of burning houses, and carrying off defenceless women and children, those troops would be shot.

He then asked me to address the men, as it was that day just a year since they had been commandeered. I complied, and took as my text the words: "If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning"; and presented the Israelite in his fervent patriotism as an example to them.

General de Wet immediately after left us with the commandos of Heilbron and Vrede, and we trekked away under General Botha in the direction of the Rhenoster River. Before nightfall we reached it, and found there a part of the Bethlehem Commando that had just returned from the bush veld, whither they had accompanied General de Wet. These burghers joined us, and we trekked along together, until, shortly after, they left us and proceeded to their own district. How delightful it was there in the densely wooded banks of the Rhenoster River. Great wild willows and old thorn-trees grew along the placid stream, and lent an inexpressible air of peace and rest to the place.

We stayed here for the night, lit great fires of the dry wood, and broiled meat as it can only be done on the live coals of thorn-tree wood. On the following day we departed from this beautiful spot, and soon the wide sand plains stretched around us, dreary in their monotony.

It is a wearisome thing travelling on these wilds. You see nothing but long, low, rolling undulations. In the distance there arises one like an immovable

wave in an immovable sea. After an hour's ride—for a commando does not move rapidly — you have reached it, and then in the distance there is another exactly like the one behind you.

And yet, however much the wearied spirit seeks some change, and however dreary these wastes seem, they speak to the heart of him who understands their language. Abandoning oneself to their mysterious influence, one forgets that they are monotonous, as they whisper, softly as the evening breeze which wafts across their broad bosoms, of the Infinite. The mountains fill one with awe and veneration—even so the region where the horizon seems ever to be beyond one's reach.

On Friday, 5th of October, we were on the banks of the Valsch River and camped there. Some days after we trekked to the farm of Mr. B. Greyling. From there the commando went to the shop of Mr. Harvey at Otterspruit, but as it looked like rain, I accepted the kind invitation of Mr. Greyling, and remained under his roof for the night. We stopped at Harvey's shop on Sunday and Monday, and a few burghers were punished there because they had entered the shop and helped themselves to what they thought they wanted. We had a man in command who allowed no irregularities, and the discipline in the commando was perfect. Here I washed my clothes myself, as I had to do often later on. As I had no change, I had to remain at the spruit until what I had washed had got dry. I thought of the future with misgivings. "What should we eat, and what should we drink?" did not trouble me; but "wherewithal should we be clothed?" that filled me with uneasiness. We had, as we were marching along, heard occasionally that everywhere in the State the civil administration of the English had ceased. The patrols of two or three mounted police did not visit the farms any more. Nor were any taxes collected any more from the Boers

on their farms or the Kaffirs in their kraals. Since the time about the taking of Ladybrand, it had begun to be impossible for small numbers of the English to go from farm to farm, and to carry out the kind of government which obtains when there is peace in a country. If they wanted now to go from district to district they could not do so otherwise than in numbers of about 1000 men, and always with cannon. This was a new proof to us that it was impossible for England to fight us on an equal footing. We were far from being conquered.

It soon became evident that we were going to come in contact with the enemy, for, not far from us upon a hillock to the south-east of Kopje Alleen, a force moved now and again out from Kroonstad. This little hill lay on our road to the railway, and it was desirable that we should not be prevented there from carrying out the object we had in view. General Botha therefore advanced in that direction on Monday evening. On the following day it was discovered that there were no English on the hill, and a patrol was left there.

In the evening the commando went to the farm of old Mr. Delport, where we remained five days, for it was General Botha's intention to begin his real work of interrupting the communications here. On the following night, therefore, he proceeded to the railway, and broke it up not far from Ventersburg Road Station.

I was glad to be able to remain here some days, because, as my son was ill, he could thus remain under the care of Mrs. Delport and her daughter. When we left he was well again. I owe much gratitude to this kind family.

On Sunday, the 14th October, a fight took place. I had held services first for the Harrismith, and then for the Kroonstad men, and had just returned from the latter when a report arrived from the patrol

on the hill that a number of English had driven them away and taken possession of the kopje. General Botha immediately advanced against them, whilst a small number of burghers went with the trolleys we had to the farm of Mr. Taljaart. General Botha attacked from two sides, and after a short fight drove the English from the kopje to the camp at Ventersburg Road Station.

The loss of the English was estimated at four dead and thirteen wounded, and two were taken prisoners. We had no casualties. The following day we went to the beautiful farm of Mr. Hendrik Delport. He had created an oasis in the dreary sand flats. It was refreshing to see the green willows growing here on the wall of the dam, and to walk beneath the healthy fruit trees of the garden. We camped beside the dam wall, and enjoyed the pleasure of being protected by the shade of the willow-trees from the burning rays of the sun.

That night, whilst we were wrapped in peaceful slumbers under the trees, we were awakened by the wild sound of horses' hoofs. My first idea was that it was the enemy making a night attack upon us. I expected every moment to hear the report of rifle shots, and visions of imprisonment arose in my mind. There was a Commandant ill in a waggon which Mr. Delport had hidden between the trees. He put out his head through the waggon-flap and asked his sons—

"Children, what is this?"

It was not the enemy! It had been our own horses which had rushed panic-stricken to our laager. What it was that had frightened them nobody knew, but it was supposed to have been some game that had come to drink at the dam.

Repos ailleurs! it was not to be our lot to rest for long, or to remain for any length of time under the shade of the green willows.

The next day a report came that "Khaki"—the word was often used without an article—was coming, and some burghers again went to meet them. But it was only five or six of the enemy who were reconnoitring, and our burghers drove them back to their camp. On the day after a considerable number came out with cannon. General Botha ordered the commando to retire, which we did in the direction of Hoopstad. It was not long before the enemy attacked our rearguard, but they were driven back with a loss of fifteen dead and wounded; while, on our side, one man was wounded, and General Botha got a scratch on the hand. Our burghers, seeing the enemy retiring, became rash and charged. The results might have been disastrous for us, for reinforcements with a gun and a Maxim unexpectedly turned up, and our people were very nearly surrounded.

General Botha then had to retire. To continue the fight against superior numbers, armed, moreover, with guns, was not to be thought of, and he resolved to outwit the English. He therefore marched till far into the night in the direction of Hoopstad, and the English followed us.

What difficulty I had to get my bearings on those wide level plains, with no kopje or mountain to serve as beacons! I knew very well that we were proceeding in a north-westerly direction, yet it seemed to me as if we were going due north. What surprised me exceedingly was that the burghers never seemed to be at a loss. They always knew the direction, north, east, south, or west—they could instantly say where these lay.

"Where is east?"

"There!"

"Where must we look for Harrismith?"

"Yonder!"

"Bloemfontein?"

"There!"

Just lay your map open on the grass to-morrow and see if they were not right. It is because their view has not been narrowed by maps. The four winds of heaven are their compass, the stars their beacons.

The following night we marched until it was very late, and had to wait as usual for the waggons. During these halts the men flung themselves on the ground, and invariably fell fast asleep. When the order came to mount there was sometimes a little confusion. A lad of sixteen, who was still half-asleep, mounted his horse; a thud as of something soft falling on the ground was heard. As it was very dark, we did not know what it meant; but some close by explained that the boy, poor fellow, not being well awake, instead of getting astride, had got right over his horse and landed on the other side. When we had proceeded to thirty miles from Hoopstad, we turned suddenly on the third night at such an acute angle that our route ran almost parallel with that by which we had come. On the following morning we reached the shop of Jelleman, and learned during the course of the day that the English were still persistently following up their original course. They had not then adopted the flying-column system, and went on with their encumbrance of large convoys, with an impetus very much like that of an elephant which, when charging, cannot make a short turn. This enabled General Botha to carry out his manœuvre successfully.

The following day was Sunday, the 21st of October. We were then at the farm of Mr. Singleton on the way back to the railway. It was a lovely day, and very refreshing to hold service there under the trees at a dam. Here an attack had been made on us the previous night, which we had been unable to resist. I shall describe it.

There had been a strong wind the day before with signs of rain, and we had prepared ourselves as well as we could for a wet night. But it did not rain—something else happened: an attack—oh, that the muse of Aristophanes inspire me while I record this—an attack of frogs! We had lain down to sleep near the dam, and shortly after we had retired to rest the frogs came out of the water. Perhaps the strong wind, causing a movement in the waters, had sent them forth. They came in large numbers and leaped about to their hearts' content. Here one tumbled on the blanket of a sleeper, there another placed his wet feet on the face of another, and you heard screams in the darkness, as of persons shrinking back from cold baths. It was thought that the attack could be repulsed by blows from hats and boots. But the amphibious enemy had not the least inclination to sound the retreat. They unceasingly renewed the attack, and were continually being supported by fresh reinforcements from the dam. The issue at length hung in the balance, and the shame of a possible defeat filled us with apprehension. Woe is me! The human beings retreated. Here one man snatched up his bedding and fled—and there another. I must record it. Our warriors lost the battle, and were forced to evacuate their positions before an attack of—Frogs!!

In the afternoon we proceeded. Nothing of interest took place. Each day we travelled some distance. The red sand of the desert was in evidence, and the level plains remained as dreary as ever. It was very dry, and the heat was often very fatiguing. Water was procurable from dams and wells only; the water of the former was often dirty, and that of the latter brackish. We had often to drink where our horses drank, and where the geese and ducks swam. On one occasion, after we had boiled our small kettles and drunk our corn coffee, we heard that we had

made coffee with the water of a dam in which shortly before some 400 soldiers had bathed! How dreary it is to be in a country where there are no springs and no streams.

In the course of our wanderings through the sandy plains we came to the farm of a man named Stiglingh, and there I saw for the first time what a farm looked like where the English had burnt down the house.

There stood the walls with black borders to the doors and windows and along the gables, proving that the building had been a prey to the flames. The tops of the trees before the house were scorched, and a vine lay half torn from the wall against which the owner had trained it. It was dreadful within to go from room to room and view the total destruction there. The heaps of ashes showed that the devastation was complete.

And what was the effect of this spectacle on the burghers?

Fear? Dismay?—No, resistance! Everyone who contemplated the ruins only felt the more deeply the wrong that was done to our people. Here was a nation which prided itself on its love of freedom, depriving a little people of their independence; and doing this in the most cruel manner, robbing them of their cattle and destroying their dwellings. Indignation and a sterner resolve to resist were aroused by the sight of the ruin. Those black borders round the gaping windows and doors conjured us not to lay down our arms and beg for mercy; no, but to keep the war going. The enemy had shattered all hopes of reconciliation.

I will describe how the house-burning was generally done. A burning party of the British came on a farm, and the soldiers would begin by chasing the poultry about and killing them. The officer in command immediately gave the occupants a short time to carry out food and clothing. The time given

was usually so short that they were still busy carrying out things when the flames would burst forth. The incendiaries generally put the chairs and benches on the dining-room table, tore down the curtains from the windows and stuffed them in between the chairs. Then paraffin oil was squirted over everything, and the light applied. Soon dense clouds of smoke arose and the house was in fla nes.

The head of the house here—so his wife told me—was ill when the burning took place. Notwithstanding that he was taken prisoner. His wife—for the English had not yet begun to capture women—had to take refuge in an outhouse and stable with her children, where I found her, subsisting on meat and mealies.

We left this farm in the afternoon with the object of crossing the railway that night. Kopje Alleen soon hove in sight, and we passed it, leaving it on our right.

Kopje Alleen! Is there elsewhere on earth a geographical object so insignificant, but glorying in such world-wide fame, as thou. O Kopje Alleen! I call to mind how, thirty years ago, I heard of thee, and travelling towards thee, I counted the days which would pass before I should behold thee, and be filled with admiration. At last thou didst loom on the horizon! But I could not believe that it was thou, Kopje Alleen, whose fame had spread far and wide—thou mere mole on the face of the veld. But a cripple is an easy first among lame people; and here thou standest, monarch of the undulations of the sandy plains.

The thorn-trees here, the red sand in the road, the hard tufts of grass in the veld, all reminded me of the neighbourhood of Kimberley—and I was not surprised to learn that the diamond mine of Mr. Minter was close by.

Having off-saddled a little while near the flat hill where there had been a fight the week before, we went on in order to cross the line before daybreak.

What sensations arise within one when such a task has to be undertaken. Will there be patrols of the enemy on the line? will shots be fired? will there be confusion? These are questions we ask ourselves. But we must suppress our emotions, and whatever there may be in store for us we must be prepared for everything.

This night march was similar to the others. We saw the Southern Cross shining in the skies. In the east there rose first the Pleiades, then Orion, then Sirius, and still we went on and on; but how slowly, owing to the waggons and carts lagging far behind. The sky above was constantly changing. The Southern Cross which had set rose again, and at last Sirius shot down his rays perpendicularly upon us, and yet we had not reached the railway line. And then, to our high-strung nerves how loud seemed every sound in the stillness of the night,—the order had been given that we should proceed in the greatest silence, but what a noise the trolleys and carts made, and how loudly the pots and pans which were carried on the carts and pack-horses sounded; and oh! why did those three foals whinny so incessantly? We felt sure that the English had become aware by all these noises of our coming, and were waiting for us at the line.

Thus three parts of the night passed away. "How far is it still?" we asked. "Half an hour!" is the reply. After half an hour we ask again, "And how far is it now?" "Three-quarters of an hour!" Suddenly a sharp point of light glints in the east. It must be a patrol fire. No, it is the morning star, and before long the rosy dawn begins to tint the eastern horizon! After all, we shall not reach the line before daylight.

But there the leading horses are beginning to halt at a little gate. We reach it and pass through. The horses grind small stones under their hoofs.

In the twilight we see two rails pass under us—we have crossed the railroad!

There were no English to hinder us in our march over, and from the side of Ventersburg Station, where their camp was, they could not now advance, because our corps of scouts had at midnight destroyed the line between them and us. General Botha now restricted himself to breaking down the telegraph poles, and destroying the wire for the distance of a thousand yards.

We now proceeded to the beautiful farm of Mr. Minter. Nothing happened excepting that shots were fired at some soldiers, who had gone out from the camp near the station to reconnoitre.

When we crossed the railway we left behind the wide sandy plains, and we wished them farewell with all our hearts. General Botha intended now to make attacks on the enemy from the south side of the line.

CHAPTER X

VENTERSBURG

IT had been extremely warm all the time we spent on the sand plains, and on the day that we crossed the railway line the heat was intense. In the evening a dark mass of clouds rose to the west. Lightning flashed from them, and we heard rolling in the distance. The burghers had to make preparations against the rain which would certainly fall. Blankets were spread on the ground, and those who possessed them spread their small canvas tents, remnants of those supplied them by the Government in the beginning of the war. Some had small patrol tents. As far as our party was concerned, we five crowded into a small Carbineer's tent intended for two. There we passed the night, half sitting, half lying, listening to the beating of the rain without. When we arose the following morning our limbs were so cramped that it seemed as if old age had suddenly overtaken us during the night.—Nothing causes more discomfort to a horse-commando than rain.

During this week we travelled a very short distance.

Towards the end of the week we were on the farm of Isaac Cronje. His wife and her sister showed great kindness to the men, and I was very glad to take refuge from the rain under her roof on Saturday night.

That evening—27th of October—General Botha went to the railway line with a number of burghers. Early in the morning he surprised the enemy in

their camp at Ventersburg Road Station, and 120 soldiers were disarmed. While these soldiers were laying down their arms, one of them seized his rifle and fired on the burghers, wounding Assistant Commandant Jan Meyer in the arm and hand, and Burgher Nortje in the hand.

Just at this juncture a train was captured, and our men were busy taking from it what they needed and setting it on fire when an armoured train with a cannon bore down on them. The burghers were compelled to leave everything and to retreat in hot haste. Two other burghers were also wounded. I bandaged them, but as the wounds appeared to me to be rather serious I requested the General to call in the aid of Doctor Snijman of Ventersburg. The doctor was good enough to come, attended to the wounded men, and instructed me how to treat them further. The patients remained under my care until later on they got assistance from medical men.

The following day there was a report that the English were moving out from their camp. We rode out in the direction where they were said to be, but it proved to be a false alarm. However, it was seen that they were making such movements that General Botha deemed it necessary to order the whole commando to take up a position for the night, and the waggons were ordered southward early in the morning. Our burghers accordingly took positions on a ridge. When day broke they observed that the British were on the same ridge. What their object was we did not know.

The day was ushered in by a tremendous fire of small arms, and in between came the thunder of the British guns. A raking fire from both sides was kept up for half an hour, and our men managed to put the gunners of one of the cannon out of action. Unfortunately our right wing was in danger

of being surrounded, and had to retire, with the result that the General could not profit from the success that had been gained on the left. Here again the positions had to be abandoned. On we went, without being followed up, to Paddafontein.

The burghers spent a very unpleasant time there. On the second day after we came it began to rain at sundown. Showers fell steadily for two nights and a day. What discomfort a mounted commando has to suffer while it rains. Some of the men have tents, only a few have carts, the rest, the majority, must manage as best they could. They get wet through from the drops falling from above, and when they lie down the water flows in below. And then there are the horses seeking shelter behind the carts and tents, treading mud puddles all over the camp. On the morning after the first night the General saw that the commando could not remain thus in the rain, and he ordered the officers to seek shelter for the burghers on the neighbouring farms. I had already found refuge in the house of Mr. Potgieter, and during the bad weather I passed a pleasant time with the books of Mr. Fairclough, the schoolmaster there. Our wounded also found shelter here.

At this place I found that there were six or seven families of fugitives from the burnt-down houses. Amongst them there was a woman who had recently given birth to a child in the open veld, when along with other women she sought shelter, after her house was burnt. On Monday the burghers re-assembled; General Botha had meanwhile been about everywhere in the neighbourhood. He had seen many burnt-down houses. They also showed me a notice signed by General Bruce-Hamilton, which had been posted on the houses that had been destroyed; General Bruce-Hamilton said in this notice that he had "partially" burnt the town Ventersburg and also

the farms in the neighbourhood, because the Boers had made attacks upon the railway. The "Boer women," so ran this notice further, "should apply to the Boer commandants for food, who will supply them, unless they wish to see them starve!"

In the evening we proceeded to Lools Spruit where at one glance I saw no less than six burnt-down houses.

The following day, the 6th of November, I went with General Botha to Ventersburg. It was sad to pass through the burnt-down part of the town, and to see the houses roofless, and with gaping doors and windows.—And what effect had it all?

The burning of the town and the farmhouses near the railway did not stop the burghers from attacking the lines of communication of the English. Our people would not in this way be forced into submission. Even upon the women this action had not the effect which the enemy contemplated. I met several of them in the town, they were calm and resigned under their severe sufferings, and told me that they had, on the evening before the fire, held a prayer-meeting, and that they had been supported and consoled by God in a wonderful manner. The period of the forcible removement of our women into concentration camps had not yet come, and now there were many women at Ventersburg requiring support. For this purpose, General Botha had sheep and wheat sent to them. He left them in charge of Mr. Albert Williams. They could not have been intrusted into better hands. He was an honest and energetic man, and possessed, moreover, a heart ever open to the weak and suffering; unfortunately he was killed in a fight a few months after. I felt his death very keenly, and it is now a sad consolation to me to have been able to speak of his fine, unselfish character.

We remained in the neighbourhood of Ventersburg

until the following Sunday, when I held service for the women there; and in the afternoon we went on our way, with the object—although that was as yet unknown to the burghers—of proceeding to the Cape Colony. Some days before we began our journey our company was temporarily broken up by the departure of General de Villiers to the district of Harrismith. As he was suffering from an internal complaint, which made it difficult for him to ride on horseback, he went away to fetch his waggonette. I then attached myself to Assistant Commandant Jan Meyer. We had heard towards the end of the week of what had happened to General de Wet at Bothasville. This did not tend to cheer us, but at the same time we were not discouraged. Not only had every tendency to the despair which had taken possession of us at Nauwpoort disappeared, but we had also in General Botha a leader who inspired his men. I have never seen him show any signs of despondency, and the burghers had faith in him. We began, then, to move southwards. We proceeded with the greatest speed, and on Wednesday evening, the 14th of November, camped at the farm of Mr. Hans Bormann at Korannaberg.

President Steyn and General de Wet had, after the occurrence at Bothasville, also travelled south, and arrived where we were that same evening. Before retiring for the night I met the President. He had much to tell about his adventures in the Transvaal, and of his remarkable escape at Bothasville. I admired his courage and cheerfulness, and thought of how much we should be indebted to him, if ever God should see fit to grant us our Independence.

CHAPTER XI

WITH GENERAL DE WET TO THE ORANGE RIVER—THE TAKING OF DE WET'S DORP

ON the following day the President and General de Wet addressed the burghers, and informed them that they were to go to the Cape Colony.

On that same afternoon, the 15th of November, the march thither commenced. It was touching to see, however contrary to the desire of many Free Staters it was, how eager the colonists among us were to start. One of them sitting on his horse, said to a friend of his seated on a cart drawn by two mules, "Yes, John, though it be only with mules, still, every step is a step nearer!"

The intention was to go that evening to a store at Brand's Drift, but on the way we heard that the English were there, and we spent the night on a ridge to the left of the road. On the next day we proceeded, and passed the store without any mishap; for the English had either gone away, or had not been there. In some heavy showers of rain we continued our journey to Newberry's Mill, and there we halted for some hours.

The weather cleared up in the afternoon, and we saddled our horses shortly before sunset, with the object of passing through Sprinkhaans Nek[1] that same night. But General de Wet knew that the English

[1] So the ridge was named near Zwartlapberg ever since the famous passage of the 14th December 1900. Sprinkhaans Nek proper lies somewhat farther north.

had forts there, and that in all probability this could not be done without coming into contact with the enemy. He therefore sent the burgher Frank van Reenen with a white flag to the fort nearest to the route we should have to take, with a message that if it did not surrender we should have to take more drastic measures. As was to be expected, the English refused this demand, and the fort was thereupon bombarded.

Darkness fell, and while General Botha with a number of men was attacking the fort, the rest of the commando with the carts and waggons passed through to the eastward. The bullets from the fort whistled over those passing by, and Assistant Commandant Meyer, who sat in a cart, was again wounded. But beyond this, except that some horses were hit, we passed through without any loss. The object not being to take the fort, but to get through the nek, General Botha was called back as soon as the commando was safely through. We encamped a short distance from Zwartlapberg.

Mr. Pontsma of the Netherlands Ambulance in the Transvaal joined us in the nek, and I was glad to hand over the wounded to his care.

Early the following morning we went forward. We passed through what was formerly Maroko's territory. Here we had no trouble from wire enclosures or gates. What peaceable people the Barolong Kaffirs must be not to require that peace-maker "Barbed wire."

Our road now led us across the sources of the Modder River, and on Sunday, the 18th November, we rested, and held service about six miles from De Wet's Dorp, while General Botha went to reconnoitre the forts of the English garrison stationed at that town.

During the following two days we went from farm to farm, but remained in the neighbourhood of the

town, and on Tuesday night the General commenced the attack from three sides. He ordered General Botha to take possession of a high hill on the south-west of the town, while Commandant Lategun was told to approach from the west. He himself with Commandant de Vos took the ridge on the north of the town. Early the following morning the outlying forts were bombarded by our cannon, as well as harassed by our rifles. A few burghers were wounded early in the fight and brought to the laager.

On the day after, the attack was proceeded with, and we had the pleasure of seeing several important forts taken. But the chief work was done on the following day, Friday, 23rd November. Nearer and nearer our men approached, steadily drawing the cordon round the British closer, and it was a very great satisfaction to General de Wet to see that he had men under him who carried out his plans. No attack certainly was better planned or better carried out than this during the whole war.

In the course of the day Commandant de Vos and Field-Cornet Baljon took a fort, in which a lieutenant with twenty men had to surrender. But the grandest work was done by Field-Cornet (afterwards General) Wessel Wessels, who was under General Botha,—to him the honour must be accorded of taking most of the forts.

His method of attack was as follows. He gave his men orders to direct a heavy fire on the loopholes of a fort he wished to take. This rendered it impossible for the defenders to fire, and gave him the opportunity of rushing swiftly with a few men to the fort. There he lay down under the loopholes, out of the fire. From this point of vantage he called out "Hands up!" and in this manner he took all the forts that fell to his share.

From position to position the British were driven, until at last the town was in our possession!

In the afternoon there were only three forts still held by them. These had now to be taken, and the danger to our burghers was very great, especially in the storming of one of them! Field-Cornet Wessels was ordered to attack it from the town side, and he began, when the sun was already rapidly sinking in the west, to approach it from a donga. We should undoubtedly have lost very heavily here if the English had opposed us any longer, for the ravine along which Field-Cornet Wessels approached afforded little or no shelter, but just as the sun was setting the white flag was hoisted. De Wet's Dorp was taken.

The loss of the English was 20 killed and 85 wounded. Eight officers and 400 men were taken prisoners, and we captured two Armstrong guns, one Maxim-Nordenfeldt, and a great deal of ammunition and provisions. Our loss was seven killed and fourteen wounded.

The English said that it was an overwhelming number of Boers that compelled this garrison to surrender; but it is certain that not more than 500 men took part in the attack. For, in the first place, all the burghers were not taken from the laager; but patrols also had to be sent in all directions to see if the enemy were not sending reinforcements. How ready the English always were to magnify our numbers when they suffered defeat.

We were generally, according to their reports, "small, roving, sniping bands"; but when anything happened to them, like the taking of a town, we were transformed as if by magic into "*overwhelming numbers*"!

We were all greatly elated, and the President was of opinion that we ought to hold a thanksgiving service. It was agreed that this should take place on the following Sunday in the church, but we were hindered in this through the arrival of a hostile

reinforcement from Edenburg, which immediately occupied the attention of General De Wet.

The laager then trekked to Plat Kop, taking the prisoners along with it. We remained there, while a considerable number of burghers went to meet the enemy. As, however, it was not our purpose to fight in the Free State, but to invade the Cape Colony, the reinforcements were left where they were, while the laager and all the men trekked on Monday far into the night in the direction of Breipaal and Klein-Bloemfontein.

That night the prisoners complained that they were made to march too far, but General De Wet reminded them some marches of Lord Roberts were still longer.

It was a most dreary trek across wide plains, and we were not in a particularly happy mood when we arose the following morning, none too early.

We were still busy with our breakfasts when we heard a cry that the English were at our heels. And such indeed was the case. There was only one ridge between us and the enemy. Presently the bullets were dropping into the laager. Confusion followed, and the majority wanted to do nothing but flee. It was only with great trouble that the officers managed to get the men into position. There was also trouble with the prisoners. They thought that they would now be relieved. They shouted, Hurrah! refused to go on, and sought shelter from the bullets of their friends behind a stone wall. But the stern bearing of our officers and the determination of their guards compelled them to continue the march.

The laager got away, and we went on to Hex River Berg and across the sources of Riet River, still in the direction of Breipaal.

In the night we passed Treur Kop, and halted on Mr. Heper's farm. In the meanwhile the English

had left us, and had gone towards Smithfield. The country through which we now travelled presented a dreary appearance on account of the prevailing drought. The veld was yellow and scorched by the sun, and when we halted for a while on the farm I have just mentioned, the west wind sang a mournful ditty over the parched country. I remarked upon the cheerless aspect of our surroundings, and Mr. Louw Wepener remarked that it must surely have been on such a day that the hill, which we had passed during the night, was named "Treur Kop" (Hill of mourning).

On the following day we reached Klein-Bloemfontein, and remained there the following day also.

Here a Council of War was held for the purpose of trying a man named Van der Berg and a number of Kaffirs who had been captured at De Wet's Dorp. Van der Berg was sentenced to death, and the Kaffirs were set at liberty with a message to Lorothodi, their chief, that as we were not at war with him, and as we wished to remain on good terms with him and his people, we sent his men back as proof of our friendship: that we hoped besides that he would remain strictly neutral, and prove this by advising his men not to enter into the service of the British.

I discovered that the court had not been unanimous in sentencing Van der Berg to death, and I therefore deemed it my duty to ask the President to order a revision of the matter. He was willing to do so, and the Council of War again took the matter into consideration, with the result, however, that the death sentence was confirmed by a majority of one vote.

The papers were handed to the Government for final decision. The sentence was not carried out.

The veld yielded very little pasturage here for our horses. A long time had elapsed since it had last

rained, and the grass was withered. Our horses and mules had therefore to live almost exclusively on the forage which we could get on the farms. They had still some on the 1st of December, but after that they had nothing but a little chaff for five days. They had therefore to subsist on the herbage which grew between the tufts of grass. It was marvellous to see the effect of this pasture on the sheep of these parts. Their flesh was almost too fat to eat; but our horses, not being used to this kind of veld, could not live on the shrubs which fattened the sheep.

On Sunday, 2nd December, we trekked to Tafel Kop, not far from Bethulie. There we would have held divine service had it been possible, but we could not, as there was a small English laager on the farm Goede Hoop, and a number of burghers set out for the purpose of taking it. They did not, however, succeed, and had to remain on the ridges to the north-east, while the rest of the commando trekked through Sliks pruit.

The fight was continued the following day, when an adjutant of General de Wet, whose name was also de Wet, was killed. At two o'clock we were ordered to proceed to the Caledon River. It was not a moment too soon, for another English force was approaching from the west, and their shrapnels dropped a little way behind the trekking laager. We continued till dark, and then we waited, our horses saddled, and the mules in harness, until all the burghers were able to leave the positions.

It had rained a little in the afternoon, and while we waited there, dark clouds lowered, and it seemed as if the drought had come to an end. Presently some showers fell, and we expected to have a wet night. And so it turned out, for shortly after we had resumed our march the darkness became more intense, and the rain descended in heavy showers.

The light of morning ushered in a clouded sky,

and we had the cheerless prospect of a soaking day and a difficult march. In the rain we passed the beautiful farm Carmel, belonging to Mr. Wessels, and proceeded without a halt until we had crossed the Caledon River at the farm of old Mr. du Plessis. Here also there was no forage. Mr. du Plessis said that the English had passed there twice and had with a lavish hand used up the forage. Our horses already began to suffer from hunger, and our rapid march was exhausting them greatly.

At two o'clock General de Wet ordered us to resume our journey, and this was done in the rain. Unfortunately the horses of the Krupp gun had knocked up, and it was left behind at the river. When General de Wet heard this on the following day he was very angry; for the gun should have been brought on at any cost.

In the evening the vanguard of the commando had reached a range of hills about two miles from the drift across the Orange River at Odendalstroom.

A Field-Cornet was ordered in the evening to go forward, to open up the road into the Cape Colony. But the heavy travelling in the wet weather had detained us so, that the darkness setting in as we approached the drift made this impossible. We therefore had to halt at the hills above referred to. I broke off some twigs from the shrubs, spread the ox-skin upon them, and thus on the soaking ground I lay down to rest. It rained softly almost the whole night, and on the following morning the bedding of almost all the men was wet through. Our horses looked miserably worn, after the rain and the forced marches. Those who accompany General de Wet must be prepared for such things.

From the ridges on which we were we could see some tents. They belonged to the English guard, and stood on the opposite side of the river, not three miles away. The 400 prisoners-of-war were released here

(5th December), but the officers were still retained. Towards ten o'clock we advanced, but—it was not to cross the Orange River, for it was in flood and a passage was impossible. And we could not remain where we were until the river became passable, for the English were pursuing us very closely. There remained therefore no other way for General de Wet than, for the present, to turn his back upon the Cape Colony. His disappointment must have been great.

We now turned our faces northward towards the town of Smithfield. I thought with sympathy of the colonists who were with us. No doubt many of them had seen, on the other side, natural objects well known to them, and now they had to be content with the sight of them only. For them every step now was not nearer, but farther away.

CHAPTER XII

BETWEEN TWO FULL RIVERS

THE weather had cleared up beautifully. The air was deliciously cool and bracing. Everything, as is usual after rain, seemed to revive. But shortly after midday clouds rose again in the west, and a violent shower of rain, accompanied by thunder and lightning, fell by way of farewell. At night all was clear again, and the stars shone brightly. We had got to Smith's Rest.

At midnight we were roused. The report had come that the English were pursuing us very closely. Immediately we saddled and inspanned. We ploughed on through the mud, and so gained on the enemy. A little after sunrise we outspanned and rested for a short time. Before noon we were again on the move to get out of reach of the foe.

The veld was more beautiful than the day before. A carpet of green stretched out all around, and that served much to cheer us. But our poor horses were not invigorated. They suffered terribly from hunger, and could not yet graze on the short young pasture. The consequence was that, already then, some 150 had become so exhausted that they had to be left behind. This was the case with the horse lent to me by Mr. Adriaan Dolebout—that faithful animal so sure-footed, and never needing either spur or whip! It had travelled through long winter nights without any sign apparently of fatigue; it had often rescued my son from danger! And now it had to be left

behind! With great emotion Charlie took the halter from its head, and when it remained behind exhausted, it still neighed a farewell to the pony that had been its companion since the 2nd of August.

Proceeding, we saw beautiful landscapes spreading out before us. To the left just above the horizon, Aasvogel Kop raised its head; right before us towered the proud Wolve Kop, whilst to the right in the purple distance we saw Gnoesberg and Aasvogelberg standing sentinels over Zastron. And everywhere before us, behind us, and on both sides of us were the hills, rejoicing in their newly acquired garment of green.

At first we marched straight towards Wolve Kop, but when we got near to that mountain we suddenly turned to the left, and off-saddled for a while at a farm where we got one bundle of forage—only one—for each horse. This was the first forage for five days. In the evening we went on some distance farther.

It soon appeared now that we could not choose to go either to the left or to the right to avoid the English. We were between two full rivers; for the Caledon had also become swollen after we had crossed it. Still less could we come to a halt, for the force which pursued us had so greatly increased, that to fight was out of the question. Besides, the English had a great many cannons. Our scouts estimated that there were about twenty-five guns. The English themselves, as we learned later from the newspapers, gave a larger number. There was therefore no time to delay, more especially as the enemy often was not farther away from us than nine miles. On the second day after we had turned at Odendalstroom we went forward with the purpose of crossing the Caledon with the bridge. We knew that there was a guard there, but for a force like ours they did not amount to much. They might be driven away. And so we began to bombard them. It was soon seen, however, that the guard could not be driven off before the large

army which was following us would overtake us, and the plan of crossing over the bridge was abandoned. The state of affairs was indeed critical. General Botha called me aside, and advised me to hold myself in readiness to gallop out on horseback if my cart[1] was in danger of being captured. After some delay near the bridge, nothing remained for us but to go up along the Caledon and try to find a ford which would be shallow enough to enable us to cross. We therefore proceeded with the greatest speed, hoping for the best, but constantly apprehensive lest, even if we found a ford, we should be caught up there.

But all went well. At sunset we reached Lubbe's Drift. A better place to cross we could never have desired, and the river had now also fallen so much that we could pass over without delay. That evening we were for the present out of danger, and here and there one could hear a psalm being sung: a thing that had not occurred during the past week.

[1] At Ventersburg I had a cart lent me by General Botha.

CHAPTER XIII

INCESSANTLY HARASSED BY THE ENEMY

THE enemy continued to pursue us, but not now at such close quarters as on the previous day, and next morning we could proceed more at our leisure. It was also fortunate that we could do this, for otherwise many horses, starved and worn-out by the rapid marches, could not have held out. More than 300 of them had now been abandoned, and some of the burghers had to walk, whilst others led their tired horses.

Not far from the ford we passed the beautiful farm "Zevenfontein" of Mr. Jacobus Swanepoel. The luxuriant growth of the trees before the house and in the orchard testified to the presence of a plenteous supply of water, and that the name "Seven Fountains" was one well chosen for this farm. Formerly this was the site of the mission station "Beersheba."

Having halted here long enough to enable everyone to get some forage for his horses, we went on to the farm of Dr. Lottery.

The following day was Sunday, and now, at last, we could hold our long-deferred thanksgiving day. I spoke in my sermon of the despondence of the Prophet Elijah, and after I had done two of the burghers engaged in prayer.

Two days after our arrival here we had advanced after nightfall as far as Helvetia. There we found plenty of mealies and could feed our horses well. In the course of the day General de Villiers had again

joined us. He had got his waggon, and had followed us with the commando of Commandant Hasebroek. They had not been able to pass through Sprinkhaans Nek, and had had to make a long detour round Bloemfontein. I was very glad to meet my old friend once more.

We betook ourselves to rest, but restful we were not; for our scouts had reported that the enemy had again come up within a very short distance of us. Next morning it became evident that such was the case, for then the English were only a few miles behind us. With the greatest speed we saddled and inspanned and very quickly the laager hurried on, whilst the burghers took up positions to hold back the enemy until the waggons and carts were out of danger.

In the meanwhile the English had advanced so rapidly that they were able to fire on the hindmost waggons with a Maxim-Nordenfeldt. In the confusion caused by this, and the excitement which reigned everywhere, four of the English officers contrived to escape.

From time to time our men had to retire before the overwhelming force that pursued us and take up new positions. This went on during the whole day, until we got beyond Hex River Mountain.

During the night the forced marching was continued. General de Wet went first of all in a westerly direction towards Edenburg, with the object of getting round the English and thus proceeding to the Cape Colony again; but hearing that there was a force of English he changed his course in the night and went north, and later on east, leaving the village of Reddersburg to the left. At daybreak we halted not far from De Wet's Dorp. It was thus that General de Wet managed to keep out of the hands of the enemy.

From the place at which we now were, the rest of the English officers were released. They were

captured at De Wet's Dorp, and after a long detour they were set free at the same town.

In the night of that same day we reached Plat Kop, where we in our march to the south had halted for some days after the taking of De Wet's Dorp. General de Wet thought that by having made so wide a turn he would be rid of the enemy for some hours, and he ordered the following morning after breakfast that we should proceed to Daspoort in order to have better pasturage for our animals. Everybody thought that there was time enough to carry out this order, and began preparing the morning meal leisurely. The majority were still engaged in this when it was reported that the English were on the ridge towards the north-west. We could not believe this, but it was true enough, and presently we heard the crack of rifle fire. Again there was a confused flight. Some sped east, others south. The Maxim-Nordenfeldts again played upon the waggons in the rear, and the officers had again the greatest trouble to get the burghers into position. How miserable it is when a laager becomes panic-stricken. At Daspoort, therefore, it was impossible to remain. We hurried past and halted some miles from there at a suitable ridge on the farm Rietfontein. Here General de Wet made a demonstration as if he were going to take positions on the ridge and wait there for the English to come; but when it became dark he ordered us to saddle, and the whole commando proceeded with the object of getting through Sprinkhaans Nek before dawn the following day.

A short distance in front of us marched the commando of Bethlehem, under Commandant Michal Prinsloo. This Commandant had on the previous night come to us through the nek without any mishap, and had now under these circumstances to return immediately.

CHAPTER XIV

SPRINKHAANS NEK, 14TH DECEMBER 1900

WE rode all through the night with our weary and hungry horses. It was a cold night for this time of the year. The wind that blew from the south seemed to cut right through us. We progressed very slowly, as is always the case by night; and this night we seemed to go more slowly than ever, for besides the usual delay caused by the waggons and tired horses, there were many burghers on foot.

How slowly we went! Zwartlapberg, which we knew we had to pass, loomed a dark and undefined mass on the distant horizon, and seemed to come no nearer. And we began to fear that we should not be able to pass through Sprinkhaans Nek before daylight. And so it proved. For after we had ridden for hours, all too soon the morning star arose and a long low arc of light suffused all the eastern sky with crimson. Rapidly—more rapidly than we wished—the darkness had vanished, and plains at the foot of the mountain we were making for lay all revealed in the growing light of day. We crossed through a rivulet, and when the sun rose we were marching over the slopes below Zwartlapberg. Though we had hoped to reach that spot before it became light, our fears had somehow calmed down as we were riding along there. Was it the daylight that vanquished the apprehensions and uncertainties of night?

But there was a cause for being at ease. The

Bethlehem Commando had gone on ahead, and had passed through. We should no doubt manage the passage. So, without perturbation, the laager went forward, slow but determined, when—Boom!

We hear the thunder of a cannon fired from Zwartlapberg, and a shell bursts on the ground near the front waggons. A second shell soon follows, and then a third and a fourth; and the mounted men and those on foot, the waggons and the carts, immediately wheel from the mountain and race away, scattered and in confusion, all over the plain to the west, to get out of range of the cannon.

About three or four miles from the road on which we had been travelling we came to a standstill. We can now collect our scattered senses. We discuss the situation. The state of affairs is not encouraging. Let us see how they stand.

We are certain now to meet with resistance from the forts in front of us. From the rear the English are advancing in great numbers. To the right and left it is just the same, for there too we shall come in contact with the enemy.

What is to be done now? Some say we must remain where we are, others that we must get through the nek at all costs. President Steyn declares we must go through, and General Fourie has already expressed the same opinion, and as neither General de Wet nor General Philip Botha are present at the moment, this officer puts himself at the head of the commando and bravely rides on.

The whole commando, waggons and carts, mounted men and those on foot, follow him. Like a great stream they advance, as far as possible from the cannon on Zwartlapberg and as near as possible to the mountains to the west of the nek.

There were three English forts on the left (of which two could fire on us), and two on the lowest ridges of Zwartlapberg. We must now pass in

between these. We proceed, not knowing what there is in store for us. We think we are going to our death, or at least that we shall be wounded. Onward, onward flows the great stream of men on horseback and on foot, of waggons and carts. Some burghers put their spurs into their horses and gallop ahead. They take possession of a Kaffir kraal and open a heavy fire on the right-hand forts.

In the meanwhile the great laager treks on and approaches to the nek, nearer and nearer. General de Wet, accompanied by General Botha, now appears on the scene and takes on himself the further conduct of the passage. There is a deafening rattle of Mausers, to which the British Lee-Metfords reply. We reach the nek, over which we pass, and find ourselves in reaped wheat-fields, which makes it difficult for the waggons and carts to proceed; but the worn-out animals are relentlessly driven onward.

Some of the burghers take position behind the wheat-stacks here, and direct a heavy fire on the forts to the right, while the Bethlehem men, who passed through the nek at daybreak, occupy themselves with the forts to the left, and with a force coming from Thaba 'Nchu.

The bullets whistle over our heads and strike the ground all along the route we have to go. The clatter of our rifle fire fills the air. This, and the general confusion, affects the men in different ways, which can clearly be read on their countenances. Here one sees indifference, there calm resolve, yonder fear and alarm, which so paralyse the fearful that they abandon all their food, blankets, coats. But all press on! After two hours the great stream of waggons and carts and men has passed through Sprinkhaans Nek.

We ask ourselves, whence the courage which inspired us to face so determinedly what was before us? whence the strength which upheld our worn-out

horses? The enemy thought they had hemmed us in, which indeed was the case. They were in front of us and in our rear, to our right and to our left. But God was not willing that we should fall into their hands.

We had just emerged from the wheat-fields when the English hurled shells at us, but it was marvellous to see how these shells exploded in the open spaces between the burghers, without doing any harm.

At length, at about eleven o'clock, we halted, so that our poor brutes, after having been in harness and under saddle for sixteen hours, could now enjoy a long drink.

Here the Bethlehem burghers joined us. They related to us how they had come through the nek early in the morning, before dawn, and had been fired upon, as they were passing close to the forts, with the loss of two of their number. This was a matter of regret to us all; but a feeling of gratitude prevailed, for, excepting these two killed, and two more wounded in making the passage, and a few horses killed and wounded, we had come—it was a marvel to us—unharmed through Sprinkhaans Nek.

CHAPTER XV

CHRISTMAS 1900

COMMANDANT HASEBROEK did not succeed in getting through Sprinkhaans Nek with us, as he was too far behind; but he broke through the cordon some days later between Thaba 'Nchu and the Bloemfontein waterworks. Besides this, our ambulances, under Dr. Fourie and Mr. Poutsma, remained behind; but General Knox let them go, and in a few days they were once more in our midst.

Concerning our other losses, it must be noted that the men of one of the Armstrong guns taken at De Wet's Dorp abandoned it, and as the carriage of one of the Maxim-Nordenfeldts broke down, there was no help for it but to leave it behind. Besides these, a few carts and waggons were left behind.

On Saturday, 15th December, towards nightfall we held a service, as the Transvaal Government had fixed that day as a day of prayer and humiliation. The day after was both Sunday and Dingaan's Day. We celebrated the day at Korannaberg, and commemorated the vow made by our forefathers.

Almost a week passed now without our having any trouble from our pursuers. We passed the farm of Mr. Frans Schimper, greatly enjoyed the delicious oranges which we found everywhere, and remained during wet weather, on the 18th and 19th December, on the farm Mexico, belonging to Mr. Jacobus Van der Watt. After this, General P. Fourie proceeded with a portion of the commando in the direction of

Clocolan, where we had heard that the English were. The rest of us went with General de Wet to Trommel, as there was another force of English to the left of Leeuw Kop.

On Saturday we were at Rietfontein, the farm of Mr. Stephanus Jacobsz, and on Sunday we held service on the ridge to the south-west. Then we went back from the ridge to Rietfontein.

Meanwhile the enemy were again approaching from Leeuwfontein as well as from Clocolan. General de Wet gave orders that the burghers should take up positions on the hills westward between Rietfontein and Mouton's Nek.

The following day, 24th December, the English, who were advancing, were driven back from Leeuw Kop. But by the unfaithfulness of a Field-Cornet, who deserted his post without the knowledge of the other men, the English coming from the direction of Clocolan got the chance of approaching unobserved. These creeping up a ditch were thus able to fire on our men from behind. The result might have been disastrous. Our burghers, thus fired at, found themselves also attacked in front, and could now do nothing but escape from between the two fires. A son of Commandant Truter was killed there. The burgher Coenrad Labuschagne was taken prisoner. Fortunately all the others escaped, and rallied in the evening at Doornhoek.

The following morning was Christmas. "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace!" Thus in the stilly night the angels sang twenty centuries before, and we—after all those centuries, we had not peace on earth, but the sword. Alas! that after these centuries of the preaching of the good news of peace one mortal should still be seeking to take away the life of another, that one Christian people—yes, Christian people; for after Christ, not after Buddha or Confucius, are we named—should

strive to destroy the other! In spite of the gospel it was not peace but the sword.

Who really understands Jesus of Nazareth, and who of those who do understand Him are ready to sacrifice all to Him, and to live, whatever they may have to suffer for it, as He lived? There stood Doorn Kop behind us, and Wonder Kop to the right. Alongside their saddles and under the shade of some willows lay the tired burghers. How little of Christmas rejoicing there was in all this.

It was difficult to believe that we had ever enjoyed Christmas festivities. Were not the recollections which surged up in us—recollections of Christmas cheer and Christmas peace—only beautiful illusions rising from a past which never really existed, as we saw it then? The day before, with its roar of cannon, seemed to turn the angels' hymn to irony.

More or less thus had I written in my lost diary, and I had added— But let me not fall into weak meditation; let me rather, as a faithful chronicler, deal with the facts as they occurred.

Ad rem, then. We buried young Hendrik Truter in the burial-place of Mrs. Goosen, on the farm Driehoppen. And there in a quiet grave, over which the poplar leaves restlessly moved soughing in the wind, we laid him to rest, where the wicked ceased from troubling and the weary were at rest.

In the afternoon I held a service under the great shady willows of the farm, taking as text the prophetic words of John, "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and He will reign for ever and ever." I felt greatly cheered, and it became plain to me that if peace eventually came it would come through long centuries of unrest and of strife. What of that, if only it came at last? But we poor shortsighted creatures, we would measure the course of the kingdom of God by seconds! What is an age to Him for whom one day is as a

thousand years, and a thousand years are as one day? What are a thousand years to Him who forms the crust of the earth through myriads of years? However long, then, it might last, the day will yet come when the kingdoms of the earth shall become the kingdoms of God and of His Christ, and when He shall reign for ever.

After the service General de Wet said that we were that afternoon to proceed a little farther. Soon we were marching again, and at nine o'clock in the evening we camped to the south-west of Senekal, at the foot of Tafel Kop.

CHAPTER XVI

EVERYONE GOES TO HIS OWN DISTRICT

HERE at Tafel Kop, after the chief officers had held a council of war, the commandos separated. We of Harrismith, together with burghers of other districts, were now again under the command of General Philip Botha. The rest were to go under Generals Fourie and Froneman.

General de Wet shortly afterwards fitted out a second expedition to invade Cape Colony, which, however, did not get farther than Brak River. I did not accompany it (during January and February 1901), and have therefore nothing to relate about it. It is, however, well known that General de Wet, in this second attempt to make an inroad into British territory south of the Orange River, underwent still greater hardships than in the first. But although he was prevented by heavy rains from gaining his object, and had to turn back, he was not altogether dissatisfied; for on his return he declared, when addressing the burghers, that he had gained what he wanted. He had certainly succeeded in forcing the English to march long distances, and to concentrate large forces at points where at that time it was not convenient for them to do so.

But let me revert to my own experiences. On the 26th of December, when darkness had fallen, we left Tafel Kop, and camped for the night to the north of Wit Kop. There were, when we got to the neigh-

bourhood of Senekal, no English in that town; but after we had been at Wit Kop for a day news was brought that a body of the enemy had again entered it. General Botha therefore sent a number of burghers to take up a position along the road from Senekal to Bethlehem, whilst the laager remained at Wit Kop. The object of this was to allow time for about ten waggons, which had been sent to Ficksburg to fetch meal, to return. Before, however, these waggons reached Ficksburg the English had again occupied that town, and with regretful eyes we saw the long train of waggons returning without having accomplished their purpose.

On Friday, the 28th of December, we went on to Zuringtrans, and early on the following morning we started from there towards Kaffir Kop, while General Botha with a number of burghers took up positions. We were outspanned, and quite at our ease, when a report came that the enemy was advancing from Wit Kop. At first we did not believe this, but soon it proved to be true enough, and then there was again a hurried inspanning. The Maxim-Nordenfeldt was dangerously near, and we had to hasten away with the greatest speed. We passed the Sand River and Kaffir Kop to the left, and at night we encamped not far from that kop.

The following day, Sunday, we could hold no service. The burghers had to take up positions against the advancing foe at Kaffir Kop, while the waggons and carts went forward during the whole of the day to Elandsfontein, not far from Lindley.

How unfortunate was the lot of our burghers when, without cannon, they had to hold a position. Before they could get a chance of firing a single shot the position was shelled, and the English, far beyond the reach of rifles, moved round the flanks in large numbers. If, then, our men wished to avoid being surrounded they had to retreat. This now at Kaffir

Kop. The frequent withdrawal of our burghers from their positions made the enemy taunt them with being unwilling to fight, and with running away. But since the English as a rule kept our men at a distance of five thousand yards with their cannon, and kept themselves also at a safe distance, how could our people get a chance of fighting?

If the Boers, then, had no chance of fighting, they should not keep the war going: they should not attack the English when few in numbers and when they had a fair chance of firing at the enemy's troops on their flanks. So the English kept on saying; yet, oh mine enemy, what right had'st thou to prescribe to us how we should fight? Did not thine own great hero, Wellington, declare that a nation has the right to adopt every means to resist a foe that is invading its country?

We went on a little farther that night, and the sun rose on us on the 1st of January 1901 not far from Liebenberg's Vlei. We proceeded a short distance farther, and held service to celebrate the day in the garden of a farm where we had halted. I addressed the burghers on the subject of "the Old and the New."

In the evening we proceeded in the direction of Reitz, and camped at the confluence of Liebenberg's Vlei and Tyger Kloof; for it was General Botha's object to give the burghers some rest somewhere in the neighbourhood of that village.

We remained here for some days to look for a suitable spot, and the General went himself with Commandant Erwee to reconnoitre the forts of the English at Reitz. Meanwhile we enjoyed the great privilege of being able to bathe in the river; but we also experienced some discomfort from rain. At midnight on the second day heavy showers fell, and many burghers who had off-saddled in low-lying places were inundated. They had hurriedly to

jump up and carry their bedding to higher ground. This they did laughing and joking, which certainly was a fine proof of the good spirit that prevailed among them, and of the cheerfulness with which they were ready to make any sacrifice for the sake of the great cause.

It appeared that we could not remain in the neighbourhood of Reitz, for on Thursday, the 3rd of January, our attention was called to an English force marching from Senekal towards Heilbron. In a fight that day with this force we unfortunately lost several dead and wounded. On the following day another engagement took place with another body of English going in the same direction. General Botha drove the infantry some distance, but had to give it up when reinforcements with two cannon and a Maxim-Nordenfeldt belonging to the English who had passed the day before made its appearance. Whilst the General was engaged in this fight some of our men halted the ambulance waggons of the enemy, which had gone on in advance, and found in them a considerable number of the English who had been wounded on the previous day. There was also one of our burghers, but he was too weak to be removed.

Meanwhile we had from day to day gone farther and farther from Reitz, and on Sunday, 6th January, we crossed Liebenberg's Vlei and remained that night on the bank of that river not far from Leeuw Kop. Here we remained till the following morning. We then proceeded east of Leeuw Kop.

From a high ridge there, over which we passed, I saw in the distance Platberg, at the foot of which Harrismith lies. I had not seen the mountain for five months. A thrill of emotion went through me when I saw it, but I had no desire to go to the town at its foot, for no one dear to me was there now. And when I thought how the enemy had taken possession

CHAPTER XVII

THE DESTRUCTION OF THE FARMS

FOR some time after I arrived at Zwart Klip matters were fairly quiet in the Free State. I was surprised at this, and considered that the English were, from their point of view, guilty of neglect of duty.

Their inactivity in the Free State must be accounted for by the fact that they were occupied by General de Wet on the northern border of the Cape Colony, and by Generals Hertzog and Kritzinger, who had both penetrated far into British territory, in the south.

This quiet was very opportune to me. I made use of it to write over my diary ; and on Sundays I held divine service on some farm or other.

During this period the burghers who had returned were stationed all about as outposts. Two scouting corps—one under Commandant Botha, and another under his brother, Captain Botha—had already been operating for some time in the districts of Vrede and Harrismith, and had done much towards putting a stop to the small police patrols of the enemy who used to wander about all over the country. And now small bodies of burghers were stationed as guards near the towns. In the district of Harrismith there was one guard at Mont Paul, another at Broedersdal, and another at Groothoek. In the Vrede there was one near Mullerspas in the Drakensberg, and at various points around the town. In the same manner matters were regulated all through the country.

The Government also provided for the appointment of *landdrosts* (magistrates) and justices of the peace for criminal cases in each district. The guards, of which I have spoken, had very little to do during this quiet time. Each day they rode out to reconnoitre, and if a force of English marched from one town to another they harassed their flanks.

This period of comparative rest continued until about the middle of May, when the enemy began to become active in every part of the country. In the districts of Harrismith and Vrede the English approached from the direction of Heilbron and Frankfort, and marched to Tafel Kop in the district of Vrede. Others advanced from the Transvaal, and whether or not they had been guilty, from their standpoint, of neglect of duty, they now began to do their work thoroughly—or rather, I should say, in a thoroughly cruel and heartless manner.

It seemed as if they wanted now literally to annihilate us. They made use of any expedient. The farms were laid waste, the houses burnt down or damaged in such a manner as to render them uninhabitable, and grain and forage were given as a prey to the flames. Cattle were looted and sheep killed in tens of thousands.

Our women, it is true, were not killed out of hand, but they were taken by force, against their wish or will, and shut up in camps. There they were exposed to fevers and other camp diseases, and many succumbed. So it came about that, although, as I have said, it is true that they were not directly killed, it was nevertheless through the environment into which they were forced that they were destroyed by thousands.

But I am anticipating.

The hostile forces of which I spoke marched up in the eastern part of district Vrede, along both banks of Klip River, and before their dreaded

advance there was a general flight on the part of the inhabitants of the farms towards Wilge River. Waggons loaded with furniture, bedding, and provisions; carts and spiders with women and children; great troops of horses and cattle—all fled before the English as before Goths and Vandals. And all this in winter! How I pitied the misery of the women and children.

As they passed along, the English looted much cattle—but an incredible number, especially horses and cattle, were saved by the fugitives.

The enemy's forces went in the direction of the Drakensberg. They marched over Roode Nek and Vlak Nek, and we began to think that they would disappear into Natal; and many of the fugitives returned to their homes; but they had to take to flight again immediately, when they learnt that only a portion of the enemy had descended into Natal through Botha's Pass—undoubtedly to bring away the captured cattle. The other portion suddenly turned back, came through Geershoogte to the Witkoppen, and continued their work of destruction west of these hills, down Cornelis River to Verkykers Kop. Towards the 23rd of May the English had returned from Natal and joined the others west of the Witkoppen.

About four days after this the English had drawn a line of camps from Tafel Kop (district Vrede) up to Cornelis River, and then moved forward every day towards Wilge River, devastating and looting on a large scale. It is wonderful how the fugitives fared, and scarcely credible that they did not fall into the hands of the British. Some succeeded in getting round either wing of the cordon by night, others again passed through it close to the camps. What this means can only fully be realised when it is known that the fugitives consisted mostly of women and children, and that (although they were

directed how to trek by the fighting burghers) the women in most cases had to drive the carts, and in some cases even the ox waggons, themselves. Notwithstanding all these difficulties most escaped. Here and there a small laager was captured, but the majority baffled the enemy. A laager of women, however, in which I was by chance, was not so fortunate.

On Saturday, 25th of May, I had gone to Frankfort to hold divine service. I remained there till Monday the 3rd of June, and then news was brought to the town that the great cordon of the English, of which I have spoken above, was swiftly advancing. The inhabitants of the town, mostly women and children, left the town on Monday morning and trekked across the bridge, while I went on to the farm of Mr. Christiaan de Beer. On Wednesday the laager came there too, and as it was their intention to trek all through the night, in order to pass round the south wing of the English, I joined them, hoping to be behind the British the next morning.

The Frankfort laager had increased considerably since Monday, a number of Transvaal women having joined it, and now consisted of about seventy waggons. Some of these Transvaal women had been trekking about for a year, and, as may be expected, presented a very worn appearance. The sun had just set when the laager reached the farm of Christiaan de Beer, and shortly after passed it, and continued in the dark until the moon rose.

It was a long night passed under particularly sad circumstances. Whatever I had gone through in night marches during this war, this night added what I had not experienced before. This was the most miserable of all, on account of the presence of weak women and tender babes. If anyone wishes to witness real misery, let him go to a large women's laager.

In this laager there were girls who rode on horse-

back all through the night, and that on men's saddles, which had been so arranged that a girl could ride on it. I saw a little maiden take the riem and lead the team of oxen before the waggon. And then the poor little children! They moaned and cried at the bitter cold of the winter nights of June—poor mites in thin linen or cotton garments. Boys of ten and twelve had to drive on the cattle, and the parents had perforce to speak harshly to them, in order to help them in their bitter task.

How my soul rose up with indignation at the merciless force that had caused such scenes of misery —that exposed babes to the cold of the long winter nights, and drove women, who refused to be captured, into the wilderness.

The Basutos in our war with them robbed our cattle, burnt our houses, and killed our men, but they left our women and children unmolested. It was reserved for the British Empire, at the height of its power, its civilisation, and its enlightenment to make war on women and children. And yet, it was astonishing to see that the poor women, in spite of all this, were not utterly discouraged. How admirable they were. Whatever may have been the feeling deep down in their hearts, suppressed and stifled there, outwardly they were full of courage, and even to some extent cheerful. One of them even baked dampers at midnight, when we halted to give the weary oxen a rest. That, however, we ought not to have allowed, for not only did it cause delay, but our fires showed the enemy where we were.

After waiting for two hours we went on again. We made considerable progress until we came near to the farm of Mr. Gert Oosthuizen. There a waggon got stuck in the mud. This caused delay, and after the waggon had been extricated, day quickly began to dawn. Again we proceeded, and shortly before sunrise we had reached Concordia, the farm of Mr.

Abraham Strauss. Here we learned that the English were approaching from Steil Drift. The waggons immediately went south-westward in the direction of Reitz over a ridge, and fifty men mounted their horses and hurried away. I also left the laager and hastened as fast as the mules could drag the spider.

After driving some distance I looked round and saw that the English had gained the ridge which we had just crossed. Everywhere on the horizon the ground seemed covered with horsemen. It began to be plain that there could be no escape for me, but still the animals were urged to go on as hard as they could. I was nearly a mile away from the laager, which meanwhile had fallen into the hands of the enemy, and almost out of danger when some troops came up. They were indignant that I had not remained with the laager, and ordered me with curses and indescribably foul language to halt. I did so, and surrendered myself.

"Outspan them horses!" a soldier shouted to me [they were mules].

I refused.

"I am your prisoner, not your servant," I said.

That was foolish on my part, for I was completely in their power, as I also later on admitted to an officer, but I was unaccustomed to being addressed in this way by common soldiers. The rage of my captors now rose to a climax. Two of them stuck cartridges into their rifles and an officer levelled his revolver at me. I then thought that, there being no question of principle here, it would be senseless to allow myself to be shot for a matter of this sort, and began with my son to unharness the mules.

Had they struck me then I should have understood that it was done under provocation; but that I should be struck in cold blood shortly after is another matter.

Everything was quiet, and I was busy obeying the

orders of the soldiers, when an officer of higher rank than the one who wanted to shoot me came up, and in learning that there had been a dispute, and that I had made some objections, he struck me from behind on my head with the metal head of his horse-whip. I have forgiven him. Probably also he is dead from the effects of a dangerous wound he received shortly after.

We had then to inspan again, and were ordered to go to a Kaffir kraal at Graspan, in the vicinity. Thither also the laager and forty-three captured burghers were brought.

Some women visited the men there, amongst whom they had husbands and sons, and brought food and coffee. It was a sad sight to behold; the women wept and loudly expressed their fears that they would be separated from their husbands. I tried to encourage them, and besought them not to shed tears before the enemy.

With what contempt did the English look down upon us. Not some of them merely, but all. The lowest soldier vented his scorn in foul language, and even the highest officer there forgot that he should be a gentleman, and did not refrain from insulting language. As he rode past and cast his eye over the women, he exclaimed: "What! have we a Japanese show here?"

And it was in the presence of such men that our women shed tears.

Shortly after we had been captured three or four horsemen appeared on the same ridge over which we had come, but a volley from the soldiers soon caused them to disappear.

Meanwhile some officers came and asked me whether it was I who, in the fight on Platrand (Waggon Hill) on the 6th of January 1900, had bandaged an English officer, and when I had replied in the affirmative they were very friendly to me.

And now followed some conversation with the soldiers. We learned that the force consisted of 200 men, who had left Steil Drift at two o'clock in the morning to capture us. Their column was advancing, and might be expected at any moment. My son also spoke to the soldiers and officers.

"What," he asked one of the latter, "do you think of a rescue?"

"Oh!" was the reply, "a couple of volleys will send it flying like the Boers we just fired at."

A soldier also said to his comrade that they had to keep an eye on my son, adding: "I bet my bottom sixpence the little beggar will get away yet."

And that is what did happen! We also learned that we were to be taken to Kroonstad, and this pleased me, for I did not wish to be marched into Harrismith as a prisoner-of-war. The time passed slowly till two o'clock in the afternoon. Then horsemen appeared on the ridge to the north-west.

The English thought this might be their column, and feared lest, not knowing that the laager had been captured, their troops might begin bombarding it. The officers placed themselves in a row, and made signals to the horsemen to come to the laager. They also sent out one of their men to give notice of the state of affairs. But he did not return, and when those on the ridge, after riding hither and thither as if undecided what to do, at last rushed forward towards the laager, and some others from the south and east came out on the flanks, there was no longer any doubt that they were Boers.

Orders were hastily given to resist the attack of the burghers. The soldiers caught their horses, and firing at once commenced, whilst we who had been captured were placed out of immediate danger behind a sod wall. The rifle fire now became very severe. The bullets flew in all directions. Many of us thought of what might now happen to the women

and children. Soon we prisoners-of-war were being fired at by the burghers who were storming the laager from the south-east side, and our guards allowed us to seek refuge in one of the huts.

Hardly had we entered it, when we heard the English saying that our burghers who had attacked from the eastern side had retaken the laager. This was about twenty minutes after the fight had commenced. The English now sought shelter. Some ran into two or three huts; others into a cattle kraal between the huts. There they loopholed the walls and defended themselves bravely. In the turmoil two wounded soldiers were carried to the door of the hut in which the prisoners were, and I went out to help the doctor. Whilst I was thus engaged a bullet whistled past my ear, and I saw with surprise that it came from our burghers who had taken the laager from the east side. Ten of them had taken up a position near a hut and fired thence, a distance of about twenty yards, at the English in the cattle kraal, and at the same distance also at us.

"We are Boers!" shouted the prisoners. But this did not help, for they continued shooting. From the hut near which they were firing from, they saw two or three of the English guards amongst us, and thought probably that we were acting as guides to the English. Then I also ran forward and declared that we were Boers.

"If you are Boers, then come out," they cried.

My son and I with one or two more then ran swiftly out, and lay down behind the sod-wall from which we had gone into the hut. Here I saw how one of our burghers coming from the laager to the sod-wall was struck in the right breast and fell down. He called to a comrade. As he was coming I saw a bullet strike him too. I heard him exclaim as he sank down, "I am killed too." He died immediately, resting his head on my son's shoulder. A couple of yards behind

us an English soldier was wounded. He cried aloud for water, and there was no one to give it him. Everywhere around men, as well as many oxen and horses, were being shot.

At the hut from which the Boers were firing at the English in the kraal I saw Commandant Davel. I noticed too that he was in command there, and concluded that he had led the charge. That was the case. It was he who, with his burghers, had stormed the laager from the east. I also saw Ex-General P. Fourie. My heart leapt with joy when I saw that brave old man, and I thought that the charge against him could not have been of a very serious nature if he were thus again permitted to carry arms.[1]

Shortly after we had got to the sod-wall Commandant Davel sent a white flag to the kraal to tell the English to surrender. I made use of this opportunity to go—it was only six or seven yards off to the position held by our burghers at the hut. There lay three burghers and one Englishman dead. My son armed himself again with the rifle of one of the dead men.

As was to be expected, the enemy refused to surrender, and the firing recommenced.

Meanwhile the waggons which were able to do so had begun to retire, and fifty of them reached a hollow out of range.

It would now certainly not have been long before we should have won the day completely, had not some scouts of General de Wet ridden up in haste and reported that a very large reinforcement of the enemy was swiftly approaching.

Before, therefore, the few that still remained in the huts and in the kraal could be forced to surrender, the burghers were ordered to retire. The hut where I was, was deserted.

[1] General Fourie had a short time previously been arrested on the charge of carrying on unlawful correspondence with the English.

Then my son said to me that it was time for us also, and asked whether I would follow him if he went out first. Yes. He thereupon led the way, and I followed him. But we could not get to our spider. The mules were unharnessed, and the vehicle moreover stood in the line of fire; but we were rescued from this difficulty. The cart of Mr. Christiaan de Beer stood ready inspanned, and whilst my son drove away with it, with Miss de Beer, who was wounded through the arm, I led Mrs. de Beer and her daughter out.

It was a brave deed was that done by our burghers at Graspan. From the bare ridge on the one side and the open plain on the other they had stormed the laager. Eventually they were firing at the enemy at such short range as from one Kaffir hut to the other, and were between the waggons often face to face with the troops. They consisted merely of the bodyguard of the President under Commandant Davel and those of General de Wet. There was also a small number of Transvaalers, who had accompanied General de la Rey on his journey to the President and the Chief-Commandant. Together they numbered between seventy and eighty men. But although fewer in number than the enemy, they had again given proof that it is not possible for 200 Englishmen to move five miles away from their cannon, and then to be met without disaster by a handful of our burghers. And this I say not because I wish to convey that the English are not brave. I have never seen greater courage than that displayed by them at Graspan. But it remains a fact that, as regards mobility and the handling of a rifle, they are no match for the Boers; and that when they have no cannon or have not the odds greatly in their favour, they must yield to the Boers. It is only by brute force that they could overpower us.

Dearly was Graspan paid for! Not only were the waggons that had escaped retaken by the reinforce-

ment, but thirteen of our burghers were killed and about fourteen seriously wounded.

And what did the English say about the laager that they had taken? They said that *it was a convoy of General de Wet.* This is one of the cases of the untruthfulness of their reports. It was a *women's laager* and nothing else, with not a hundred men in it, of whom some were non-combatants and others very old men. There was not a single officer amongst them, to lead those who were armed; and so it came about that there was no resistance whatever when the laager was attacked.

I left the laager when the reinforcement approached, and went to Reitz. In the evening I left the town and got to the farm of Mr. Piet de Jager, near Rout Kop, at about ten o'clock, whence, however, the people had fled in fear of the advancing English.

The large force of the English now proceeded in the direction of Heilbron and Kroonstad; but first buried their and our dead at Reitz. Two days after, our burghers came and reburied our dead (thirteen bodies) there better than the enemy had in their haste been able to do.

Before closing this chapter I must still mention that the worst that had yet befallen us took place towards the middle of July. Other troops arrived, this time from Platrand Station, Transvaal, following the track of the columns that had already traversed the country. They destroyed over again what had already been destroyed. Large flocks of sheep were collected everywhere and stabbed to death at different centres, in heaps of thousands upon thousands. In the town of Vrede there was a great slaughter, and in order to make it impossible for our people to live there the dead sheep were carried into the houses and left to rot.

Not only in the districts of Vrede and Harrismith did this occur, but everywhere throughout the State.

When I was in the neighbourhood of Senekal it took place there also. I have myself seen places where the skeletons of the sheep lay, and could hardly imagine anything sadder than to see them lying dead in heaps. The destroyers also frequently drove large herds of young horses or such as were unfit for service into kraals, or crowded them into ditches, and shot them there by tens, fifties, or hundreds, and the air was charged with pestilential odours. The troops completely destroyed the houses. Where the stables and waggon-houses were not burnt down, the dwelling-houses were devoted to the flames; and where these were not burnt down, they were so utterly ruined as to become wholly uninhabitable. The floors were broken up, the panes of glass smashed with the sashes and all, the doors broken to pieces, the doorposts and the window-sills torn out. And if it was not too terrible to permit of its being so described, one might say that the work of these men was sometimes childish—as, for instance, when on one occasion they hanged the cats in a barn, and on another shot a horse inside a house, and then covered it up with a table.

To escape from the troops the women sometimes took refuge in mountainous parts of the country in caves and grottos. Often they escaped; but on other occasions the soldiers discovered them in these places of refuge. An officer found two women with their children in a cave, and expressed himself very strongly as to what he saw there, saying that he would send a photograph of the scene to the *Graphic*, as if the picture of such misery could do credit to himself and his nation! He wrote the following letter, and handed it to one of the women to deliver to her husband:—

"To Mr. M. Lourens.

"Sir,—I am leaving your wife and Mrs. Uys in the wretched place they have to live in. If you had

any compassion on your women you would surrender to superior force and not prolong a hopeless struggle.

"R. B. FIRMAN, Lieutenant-Colonel."

27/7/01.

As one of these women was indisposed the officer left them there; but he took the little servant-girls away.

To such acts as these the officers of the British columns had fallen. They were made the persecutors of defenceless women and children. They carried the work of incendiaries throughout the whole State. They became the butchers of thousands of horses and tens of thousands of sheep. How despicable it must have been in their own eyes to perpetrate such acts! When I think of all this, and look to the far future, then I ask myself: What will be said of this war when the history of it shall be written and read by the coming generations?

CHAPTER XVIII

PRESIDENT STEYN ALMOST CAPTURED

THE things I needed most after my escape at Graspan were clothes, for all I possessed had been on the spider that I had had to leave behind. But even had I been able to rescue it, I should have found very little in it; for although I had heard an officer ordering the soldiers to lay their hands on nothing belonging to the burghers except arms and ammunition, from the Kaffir huts, in which I was held captive, I saw them removing from time to time from the spider, first one and then another article of clothing and concealing it about their saddles.

To provide, therefore, for my wants as far as clothes were concerned, I went to Fouriesburg. Not all at once could I recover my equanimity. The excitement of my capture and the fight at Graspan had, as may be well conceived, affected my nerves, and it was as if I could not clearly realise my escape. But when on the following Sunday, on the farm of Mr. Heymans, not far from Slabbert's Nek, I again saw a congregation before me, I once more completely regained my serenity of mind. It was clear to me that God had shown me that He held my fate in His Hand, and that I owed to His Mercy my liberty until the day of my capture. It was as if He had said, "Behold, I delivered you over to the enemy, and closed his hand upon you so that there was no deliverance. There is therefore nothing for you to be vain of in that you were the only one of your

colleagues in the Free State who had up to that time not been taken prisoner. But I have delivered you because I have further work for you to do. Go forth, and do good to your people. Encourage the burghers. Seek out the neglected ones. Comfort the defenceless women and children in their oppression. Preach the gospel."

And I must declare it, that since the unfortunate occurrence at Nauwpoort I never had more courage than now, nor had I been able till then to address the burghers with more pleasure than now.

I arrived at Fouriesburg on Monday, the 10th of June, and was there most kindly entertained by Mr. Jacobus Bester and his wife. The English—so I heard there—had just quitted the village, and had in the previous month laid waste everything behind the Roodebergen. In the newspapers they published how many women and children they had captured, how many burghers they had killed, how many cattle they had carried off, how many tons of grain they had burned, how many ovens and stoves they had destroyed. Thus the British Generals, stern iconoclasts, had become the takers of ovens by storm. I discovered that not so many burghers by far had been captured or killed as the English accounts had stated. It was also surprising how much grain there was left, how much even had been rescued from the flames, and when on the Sunday after my arrival I held service in the church, I found the building nearly full of worshippers, and all were in fairly good spirits. There was, notwithstanding all the destruction, no thought of surrender. What advantage would we gain thereby? Should we get the looted cattle back? should we see the burnt-down houses rebuilt?—No. Then let the enemy do his worst. Let him ruin us completely if it was our fate to be overwhelmed. The English had to do with a people who were no barbarians, but with a race sprung from

the same stock as themselves—with the offspring of ancestors who had sacrificed everything for their Faith—with descendants of forefathers who had contended for eighty years against a great world-power. Such means, therefore, as Great Britain had for the last fifty years been in the habit of employing against barbarous or semi-barbarous races had till now failed signally when applied to the people of South Africa.

I visited our people on their farms. At one place the family was living in a waggon-shed, at another in a stable, and again at another in a house restored sufficiently to make it to some extent habitable.

Some farms had not been visited by the enemy, whilst at others no damage had been done, excepting the destruction of the grain and the *stoves*! At one farm which I visited everything had been left as it had been. There was still a piano, and we spent the evening pleasantly. What thoughts passed in my mind when one of the young ladies sang well-known songs to the accompaniment of the piano, and when I remembered that the same girl, with her mother and sisters, had shortly before, whilst fleeing before the enemy, passed the night under the open sky. Both the mother and her daughters were cheerful here, and not here only, but everywhere I went. No wonder, then, that the hope that sooner or later we would gain our independence grew stronger and stronger in me. While I was at Fouriesburg the landdrost, Mr. M. Fourie, came from the Ficksburg Commando, and told me that he, Commandant Steyn, and Field-Cornet J. J. van Niekerk would be pleased if I could visit their commando. What else was I living for? I went gladly, and addressed the burghers, on week days as well as on Sundays. Amongst the Ficksburgers I found the song, written by the Rev. G. Thom, which has since become well known.

"Hope on, hope on, my brothers,
In our beloved land,
We're waiting for deliverance,
Deliverance by God's hand.

Hope on, hope on, my brothers,
Though war's dark clouds increase;
'Tis but a short time longer,
Then He will give us peace.

Hope on, hope on, my brothers,
The daylight is not far;
When the long night is ended
Will rise the Morning Star.

Hope on, hope on, my sisters,
In our beloved land,
We too lament your sorrows,
We on this far-off strand.[1]

Hope on, hope on, my sisters,
Your tears, your sighs, your pain
By Him are not forgotten,
To whom all things are plain.

Hope on, hope on, my sisters,
And still again hope on;
Through seas of blood and treasure
Our freedom must be won!"

This song was not sent out by the Rev. G. Thom for any special purpose, but it seems that, as it was often sung by the prisoners-of-war in Ceylon, it was sent out in its entirety or in portions by different burghers to their relatives as their contribution to the scanty news they had to send.

Had the censor known how this song would be circulated among us, and sung everywhere, he would certainly not have let it pass. But perhaps we have a proof here that the censor, like Homer of old, was also occasionally apt to nod.

The song was sung by the burghers of Field-

[1] Ceylon. The original of this song is in Dutch, of which the above is but a feeble rendering.

Cornet J. J. van Niekerk to the tune of the old Voortrekkers' hymn, "How pleasant are the days."

I afterwards had this sung wherever I held a service, always requesting the girls to make copies of it before the service. Mr. Mels' J. Meyers, then editor of the *Brandwacht*, afterwards printed a number of copies, which helped me much to spread the song. I have no doubt that these verses aided in a large measure to keep alive the courage of our people. While I was in these parts letters came regularly from British territory through Basutoland to the farm Brindisi, under the kind care of Mr. Middleton, the owner of the farm. I availed myself of the opportunity and sent letters to my wife, and received replies by the same means.

The relatives of the captives who had been sent to Ceylon often got news from that island, and it encouraged us much to see what a good spirit reigned amongst the exiles. Our ministers there seemed to be effecting much good by their services, and the younger captives attended schools which had been erected for them. Others passed their time in the making of beautiful handiwork of all descriptions out of suitable stone, such as brooches and similar articles, while others again worked on the roads for small wages, and in this manner obtained enough money to purchase paper and postage stamps, as one of them stated in his letter. But what particularly impressed me was the firm conviction they all had of the ultimate deliverance of our nation. Here is an extract from a letter of a young man to his mother :—

"We are full of courage, and do not mind how long we have to remain here, if only our people get the upper hand—which they certainly will."

From the Ficksburgers I went to the Ladybrand Commando, and held services for the burghers and the women.

On the farm Peru, belonging to Mrs. A. Ecksteen,

senior, I heard that the English wanted to remove, on the 19th of April 1901, the mother-in-law of Mrs. Ecksteen. As the old lady was eighty years of age, and, moreover, suffered from a weak heart, Mrs. Ecksteen protested against this deportation, whereupon the officer in command said, "She will have to go, even if she were dead." And so the old woman was forced to go on the waggon. At Karba, not far from there, the English deported Mrs. A. Ecksteen, junior, on the same day, notwithstanding her repeated assurances that she could not possibly go. A son of Dr. Wilson, the practitioner at Karba, had carried a letter from his father to the military, acquainting them with Mrs. Ecksteen's condition. But the lad got his ears boxed, and was taken prisoner (he was, however, released on the following day); and the officer said to the woman, "You'll *have* to go." Mrs. Ecksteen was thereupon taken to the *mine* on the farm Monastery, along with the other Ecksteens; she there found shelter under a waggon, but was taken during the night into a tin shanty, of which all the doors and windows had been destroyed, and under such circumstances she gave birth to a daughter!

The following morning the English realised what an inhuman act they had committed, and left the Ecksteens there with the following note:—

"MONASTERY, 20*th April* 1901.

"Mrs. A. Ecksteen, junior, having to our regret been moved from her house by mistake, when she was not in a condition to travel, Dr. Wilson has been left to take charge of her, and also her mother-in-law and grandmother to care of her. All these persons must remain on the farm Karba.

"J. (?) HALKETT,[1] A.P.M., Pilcher's Horse."

[1] This was not the officer who had removed Mrs. Ecksteen.

By mistake! and that with the woman before their eyes and the letter of the doctor in their hands!

But this is by no means the only case of this sort. A British officer had also, shortly before, taken away Mrs. Greyling, an old woman aged eighty-five, from her farm, Magermanshoek, at Korannaberg. The poor old woman could no longer walk and was totally blind. When her son inquired whether she could not travel in her spider, his request was refused and the vehicle burnt. She was carried to a waggon on a chair, and conveyed to Winburg.

I mention these cases not as exceptions, but as examples of what continually took place.

Having returned to the Ficksburg Commando on the 1st of July, I found that my son had had an accident through the explosion of a Martini-Henry cartridge in his face. This forced us to remain till the 16th at the farm Franschhoek, belonging to Field-Cornet J. J. van Niekerk. I wish here to record my thanks for the kindness of all the families there, and especially for that shown by Mrs. J. J. van Niekerk and Mrs. Meyer in nursing my son. Before leaving Franschhoek I heard of the narrow escape of our President at Reitz. He had gone thither with his staff on the evening of the 10th of July. Early the next morning his cook, a coloured boy named Ruiter, rushed into the tent where the President was sleeping, shouting, "The English are here." The President then hastily went out, without a jacket and with a nightcap on his head, and ran to the stable where his horse was. The saddle was not near at hand, and Mr. Curlewis hurriedly put his own saddle on the horse. Without bridle or bit, and with only the riem of the halter in the horse's mouth, the President galloped away. A soldier followed and shot at him; but the President's horse was fresh, and gained on the tired steed of the soldier, until he was

out of danger. Ruiter wanted to follow the President, but when fired on he allowed himself to be captured. Subsequently, however, he escaped, and related that, when they had asked him who it was that had ridden off, he had answered, "It's only a Boer." On a former occasion the President had slept in a house, and it seems that the majority of the English had surrounded that same house, and thus they had given him the chance of escaping.

But the whole of his staff were taken prisoners, with the exception of the Government Secretary, Mr. J. W. C. Brebner, who was absent on leave. The brave Commandant, Mr. Davel, who was chief of the bodyguard, was also captured. Besides the President only seven men of the bodyguard escaped. An English officer called it *luck*. We call it by another name.

All the money and State documents fell into the hands of the English. What made the loss of the documents a serious matter for us, was that amongst them was a letter from the Government of the South African Republic giving expression to a very despondent spirit about the condition of affairs, and saying that there was danger that the continuation of the struggle would only tend more and more to the ruin of our people, and that the time was gone by when matters could be allowed to drift on.[1]

[1] That letter was as follows :—

GOVERNMENT OFFICE, ON THE FIELD,
10*th May* 1901.

His Honour, the Government Secretary, O.F.S.,

HONOURED SIR,—Herewith I have the honour to inform you that on this day the following officers have met the Government here, viz.: His Honour the Commandant-General, General B. J. Viljoen, General J. C. Smuts (State-Attorney), the latter representing the western districts. Our condition was fully discussed, and the following points considered :—

First. That small groups of burghers are still constantly surrendering to the enemy, and that this danger is becoming a more and more serious one, whereby we are exposed to the risk of our cause coming

To this President Steyn wrote a long reply, dated 15th May 1901, in which he expressed his great regret at this despatch of the Transvaal Government. He said that although in the Free State they had also had to see men laying down their arms, yet that it had been surmounted ; also that although ammunition had for a long time been scarce, yet there was still after every fight enough to begin the next one with.

As to the question, what prospect there was of continuing the struggle any longer, he would ask, what prospect two little Republics had had from the beginning of winning in a struggle against the mighty England? And if at the commencement we had put our trust in God, why should we now not continue to do so? He also pointed out that if our cause were utterly hopeless in Europe, we should certainly have heard of it from our Deputation. He further assured the Transvaal Government that even

to a dishonourable conclusion, because the result may be, that the Government and the officers may be left in the veld without any burghers. This imposes a heavy responsibility upon the Government and the officers, seeing that they represent the people, and not themselves.

Secondly. That our supply of ammunition is so exhausted that no battle of any importance can any more be fought, and that we shall thereby be reduced to the condition of hopelessly fleeing hither and thither before the enemy. Owing to this also it is becoming impossible for us to protect our people with their cattle, who thus are becoming poorer and more and more despondent, and we shall soon be unable to supply our forces with food.

Thirdly. For the reasons above stated, the authority of the Government is gradually being weakened, and the danger has arisen that the people will lose all respect and obedience for their lawful leaders, and lapse into a state of disorder, and our further persistence in such a struggle can only tend more and more to ruin our people, and to make it apparent to them that it is only the enemy who has authority in the land.

Fourthly. Not only is our people being disintegrated in the way above stated, but it will also surely happen that the leaders of the people whose personal influence has hitherto kept them together will fall into total disrepute, and will lose all influence, by which every hope of the revival of the national spirit in the future will be lost.

Fifthly. The people constantly insist upon an answer to the question, what prospect there exists of carrying on the war to a successful issue, and they have a right to expect that when it is become clear to the

if, in case of an armistice, the people of the Free State were consulted, the resolution of those men who still stood their ground would be not to lay down their arms.

He also disapproved of the resolution of the Transvaal Government, to ask Lord Kitchener to be allowed to send somebody to Europe, because thereby we exposed our hand to the enemy; and he added that he was very sorry such a resolution had been taken without first consulting the Free State.

As regards the fear expressed by the Transvaal Government that they and the officers would be left without burghers in the field, the President said that in the Free State, even if the Government and the officers surrendered themselves, the people would not do so. He also showed how disastrous it would be if the Free State, which had offered up not only its blood and its treasure, but had also thrown its

Government and the leaders that there is no longer any sound reason to be hopeful for our cause, this shall be honestly and candidly made known to them. Hitherto the Government had expected that through the efforts of our Deputation and European complications there might be some hope for our cause.

And this Government feels strongly that before taking any final resolution another effort should be made to arrive at certainty with regard to this.

Taking into consideration the above-named points, the Government, with the officers already named, has resolved as follows:—

1. That a request shall at once be made to Lord Kitchener that by means of delegates to be sent by us to Europe, the condition of our country shall be communicated to President Kruger, which delegates should then return as speedily as possible.

2. That if this request be refused, or should lead to negative results, an armistice should then be asked for, whereby an opportunity shall be afforded, in conjunction with your Government, to consult the people of both States, in order finally to decide what is to be done.

This is, however, subject to any suggestion that your Government, bearing in mind the above-stated difficulties, may be able to offer.

This Government feels very earnestly that the time is gone by for allowing this matter to drift, and that the time has come for taking decisive steps, and would therefore be glad to receive an answer from your Government.—I have the honour to be,

Your Obedient Servant,

(Signed) F. W. Reitz, State Secretary.

independence into the scale on behalf of the sister Republic, were deserted by that Republic. That then all reliance of Africander upon Africander, and also all co-operation, would be for ever destroyed, and that it was a chimera to believe that thereafter the nation would rise again. If we wished to remain a people, now was the time to endure to the end.

After referring to some matter which he had read of in the newspapers, he continued in the following forcible language: "All these things make me believe that we should commit national suicide if we now give in. Therefore, brothers, continue to stand firm! Do not make our suffering and all our efforts in the past to no purpose, and our trust in the God of our fathers be turned to mockery. Encourage rather your weaker brethren." The President concluded this very remarkable letter with the question whether we were to desert the colonial burghers a second time. "May God forbid it!" he said.

Although the unfortunate letter of the Government of the South African Republic was three months old, and the feeling in the Transvaal had since its date utterly changed, this sad correspondence, as was to be expected, gave fresh courage to the English.

Both letters were telegraphed, abbreviated and mutilated, to England, and the Transvaal letter had, as I subsequently read in the newspapers, a beneficial influence (for England) in parliamentary circles. But, as I have already said, a different spirit had arisen in the Transvaal. This President Steyn found when immediately after the fight at Graspan he, together with General de Wet, Judge Hertzog, and General de la Rey, visited the South African Republic. He had not rested, after receipt of the letter from the Transvaal Government, but had immediately summoned not only General de Wet and Judge Hertzog, but also the Transvaal General de la Rey (who had not been present at the Transvaal meeting),

to accompany him to the South African Republic. When he arrived in that Republic he found that the Government had quite recovered from its despondency. This had been brought about especially by the following circumstance: the Government had carried out its resolution to ask Lord Kitchener's leave to send a delegate to Europe for the purpose of acquainting President Kruger and the Deputation with our condition, and to consult with them as to the continuance of the struggle. Lord Kitchener had refused to grant this, but had given permission to send a cablegram in the code of the Netherlands consul. The State Attorney, General Smuts, and Advocate de Wet had gone to Standerton, and sent a telegram in which the state of affairs was represented in as dark a light as possible. After a fortnight the reply came. It was short, and stated that although there was then no chance of intervention, we should nevertheless continue: the telegram said also that the two Republics should co-operate. This was said in reference to a statement in the Transvaal telegram saying that President Steyn did not approve of giving in. Moreover, two fights, in which our arms had been victorious and which took place just at that period of despondency, had served to encourage the Transvaal Government. One at Vlakfontein, where General Kemp, and the other at Welmanrust, where Commandant Muller had engaged the English. These were important fights, and refuted what had been stated in the letter of the Transvaal Government to the effect that no battle of any importance could any more be fought. Thus one thing and another had brought about such a change in the minds of the Transvaal Government, that when the President and his party met them there was no sign of dejection, and it was difficult to believe that they were the same persons who had instructed the State Secretary to write the letter of the 10th of May.

CHAPTER XIX

DAYS OF THANKSGIVING AND HUMILIATION

WHILE President Steyn was in the Transvaal the two Governments held a combined session, and prepared a proclamation in which the people were acquainted with what the Government of the Transvaal had telegraphed to President Kruger, and what the reply had been. This document contained, besides the firm resolve of both Governments to continue the war with all possible vigour, a proclamation calling upon everyone to join in a general thanksgiving on the 8th of August 1901, and in a general day of prayer on the 9th. Not only were the dates fixed and the objects for prayer and thanksgiving stated, but the proclamation also admonished us in what spirit we should set about it. Very rarely, I believe, has a proclamation been issued by a Government of modern times couched in similar terms.

I was with the Ficksburg burghers when this proclamation was read to them, and when I arrived at Fouriesburg, on the 16th of July, I received a letter from the President asking me to be with him during the days of thanksgiving and humiliation. I now set out to seek him, where he had directed me, somewhere in the neighbourhood of Nauwpoort.

It so happened that just on the 29th of July I passed the spot where General Hunter had encamped a year before, and where he had received the arms of many of the burghers who had given up the struggle at the unfortunate surrender of Prinsloo.

Once more I marked the sharp contrast of light and shadow on the proud mountains; again I gazed on the beauty and grandeur of cliff, ravine, and torrent, and again I felt my insignificance in the awful presence of Nature. But I was now in a different mood from that in which I was a year before. Then I was despondent and discouraged; now I was buoyant and looked forward hopefully. Then all was dark about me; now I looked up into the blue sky, and the future seemed nearly as bright and unclouded as the blue overhead. What a change the year had wrought. My son and I rode through the mountains at Nauwpoort on the following day, and remained overnight under the roof of Mr. Abraham Naudé. On the following day I rode to the house of Mr. Jan Roos, to get further news about the whereabouts of the President, as the landdrost, Mr. Jan Brand Wessels, stayed there. There I heard about a gallant thing done by the burghers of Harrismith under Commandant Jan Jacobsz. Early on the morning of 28th July a force of English, numbering about 200, and led by a Kaffir, had attacked one of our guards in a kopje not far from Mr. Frederick Moolman's house. The guards fled, abandoning horses and everything else. Soon news of what had happened was brought to Field-Cornet Frans Jacobsz. He hurried to the scene with a handful of men and threw the English into confusion by firing on them. When the men belonging to the guard had procured new horses on the farm of Mr. Marthinus de Jager, they returned and took part in the fight. The result of all this was that instead of the force, which had come from Harrismith, capturing the burghers of Commandant Jacobsz, 43 of them were taken prisoners and several killed and wounded. On our side only Field-Cornet Jacobsz was wounded.

The second day, after having passed through Nauwpoort, I found the President on the farm of Mr.

Wessel Naudé. Although he was somewhat indisposed, he was as buoyant as ever and showed no signs of discouragement. He told me, however, that he missed the presence of the old members of his Government and of his bodyguard very much. Mr. Hendrik van Niekerk, captain of the scouting corps raised in connection with the bodyguard, had been appointed in the place of Commandant Davel.

The head of our State then was still full of hope!

How I then, as always, envied persons of an optimistic nature, persons who never gave way to despair! If there were not men like President Steyn and General de Wet in the world, no obstacles, seemingly insuperable, would ever be surmounted.

We held the solemn day of thanksgiving and of prayer—the first on the farm of Mr. Nicolaas Kruger, the second on the farm of Mr. Willem Blignaut, and then I parted from our lovable and indomitable President, in the hope of joining him shortly afterwards. But this did not happen until the 24th of October.

CHAPTER XX

ANOTHER BRITISH PROCLAMATION

I WENT to Witzieshoek to visit my friend Mr. J. J. Ross. What an Elim the place was to me during the week I stayed there. The surroundings seemed to transport me two years back into the past. His children reminded me of my own!

And the books in the study! I read—no, I tasted—here a line from this author, there a page from another, which is wrong!—oh, I know that! But still it satisfies a person of my temperament and tastes no less than, though perhaps more ethereally, it does the reader—yes, the reader—to devour every book, word for word, that he attacks.

I skimmed—not that I always do this with books: no, generally I too read; but now I merely skimmed—here a little and there a little. Besides, I had no time for *reading*. But I had experienced enough to know now, after having had so many months of the war, where to seek the greatest minds.

I saw that the man who dips his pen in ink is greater than he who stains his sword with blood. The man who, out of sight and unaffected by the world's turmoil, gives his life to the thoughts which are born in travail, and which, whatever men may say, do rule the world—that man is greater than he who, in the great world outside, is made a hero of by a senseless rabble, because he leads a hundred thousand men. This man leads an army; that man leads the world.

When I was at Witzieshoek, the English passed through Harrismith to Bethlehem, as they were in the habit of doing almost every week. This time they had an extract from a proclamation by Lord Kitchener, which they left behind in their camps, on the buttresses of the bridge over Elands River, and elsewhere. It was not long before the full text of the proclamation[1] appeared, and this was not only sent to the Governments, but officers came out with *flags of truce* to the different commandos.

This proclamation made known that the officers and members of the Government would be banished from South Africa if they did not surrender before the 15th of September 1901; and that the cost of

[1] This Proclamation runs as follows:—

PROCLAMATION.

By His Excellency, Baron Kitchener of Khartoum, G.C.B., K.C.M.G., General Commander-in-Chief of His Majesty's forces in South Africa, High Commissioner for South Africa, Administrator of the Transvaal, etc. etc. etc.

Whereas the late Orange Free State and South African Republics have been annexed to His Majesty's dominions:

And whereas His Majesty's forces have for a considerable time been in full possession of both territories aforesaid, together with their public offices and all the machinery of administration, as well as of all the principal towns, and of the railways:

And whereas the great majority of the burghers of the two late Republics, to the number of 35,000, not counting those who have been killed in the war, are now prisoners of war, or have submitted to His Majesty's Government, and are now living quietly in villages or camps under the protection of His Majesty's forces:

And whereas the burghers of the late Republics who are now under arms against His Majesty's forces are not only few in number, but have lost almost all their guns and munitions of war, and are without proper military organisation, and therefore unable to carry on regular warfare, or to offer any organised opposition to His Majesty's forces in any portion of the country:

And whereas the burghers who are now still under arms, although unable to carry on regular warfare, continue to make attacks on small and isolated posts, and bodies of His Majesty's forces, to rob and destroy property and to damage railway and telegraph lines, as well in the Orange River Colony as in the Transvaal, and other portions of His Majesty's South African dominions:

support of the families of all burghers who were still under arms on that date would be claimable against such burghers, and would be a charge upon their properties, movable as well as immovable. The English had therefore again issued a proclamation. And how was this received by our burghers?

Many people declared that this proclamation was a sign of weakness; others spoke of it with the utmost contempt; the majority ignored it, and everyone looked forward to the 15th September, to see if it would actually be the case, as everyone expected that this proclamation would have no effect.

Meanwhile there was, as very frequently was the case, a great deal of talk about peace. Peace would,

And whereas the country is thereby kept in a state of unrest, and the carrying on of agriculture and commerce is prevented:

And whereas His Majesty's Government has resolved to put an end to a condition which causes the useless shedding of blood, and needless destruction of property to continue, and is causing the ruin of the large majority of the population, who are desirous of living in peace, and to earn a livelihood for themselves and their families:

And whereas it is right to take steps against those who still resist, and especially against those persons who, having authority, are responsible for the continuance of the existing condition of affairs, and who are urging their fellow-burghers to persist in their hopeless resistance to His Majesty's Government:

Therefore it is that I, Horatio Herbert, Baron of Khartoum, K.C.B., K.C.M.G, General Commander-in-Chief of His Majesty's forces in South Africa, High Commissioner of South Africa, by *order of His Majesty's Government*, proclaim and make known as follows:—

All Commandants, Field-Cornets, and Leaders of armed bands, being burghers of the late Republics, who still continue to resist His Majesty's forces in the Orange River Colony and Transvaal, or any other portion of His Majesty's South African Possessions, and all members of the Governments of the late Orange River Colony and the South African Republic shall, unless they surrender before the 15th of September next, be for ever banished from South Africa; the cost of support of families of burghers still in the field who shall not have surrendered before the 15th of September shall be claimable against such burghers, and shall be a charge upon their properties movable as well as immovable.

God save the King!

Given under my hand at Pretoria this 7th day of August 1901.

KITCHENER, General,
High Commissioner of South Africa.

it was said, come on the 20th of September. But the 20th of September came and went, and there was no peace. After that I never again heard that a day and date had been fixed on which there would come an end to the war.

From Witzieshoek I went to look for the President, but with the poor horses that I had I could not reach the place where he was. Meanwhile I held services wherever I could, both on week-days and Sundays, and where opportunity offered I noted down my experiences on commando. In this work I had to cope with peculiar difficulties. Sometimes I wrote at a table, whilst at other times a window-sill served me as writing-desk; but the greatest portion of my book was written on the seat of my cart, whilst I sat crouched on the bottom. I did not always have good ink, and the first pages of my notes are written in various shades; I had even to use "Nastagal" ink, made by our women. This ink was to me a new example of how inventive the Africanders are. Speaking of this gives me the opportunity of saying something about the many ways in which our people managed to lighten their burden of misery.

Our boots wore out, and men were appointed to tan hides and make boots; even women occupied themselves in this kind of work. The war had not been going for fifteen months when there was a great scarcity of soap. Then our mothers and sisters boiled a very serviceable article with the help of the ashes of mealie-cobs and of various weeds. The English destroyed the mills everywhere; but mills were mounted on waggons and carried off when the English approached. One such mill ground more than fifty bags of corn in twenty-four hours. Our corn was done before we had been fighting a year; but peas, mealies, kaffir-corn, rye, acorns, and dried peaches were used as substitutes. Through dire

necessity a fine old handicraft of our great grandmothers was revived: the spinning of wool, which was still plentiful in spite of the devastation of the enemy. Our mothers and wives and daughters span wool beautifully, considering the nature of their spinning machines. Spinning-wheels were fabricated in various ways from old sewing-machines, fruit-peelers, and so forth. I have seen socks knitted of yarn spun by these primitive machines, as fine and certainly stronger than those that can be bought in shops. Our salt was at last quite exhausted, and this was a cause of great anxiety, especially in districts such as Harrismith, where there were no salt-pans; but here again our distress was relieved, for wells were dug in the pans, where no one would have thought of digging before, and salt water was found. "Everything," it was often remarked, "was scarce; but nothing completely lacking."

We toiled or plodded along, suffering in silence, where there was no help for it, but we generally managed to find a way out of the difficulty. No suffering was too severe, no sacrifice too great but was gladly undergone or made for the realisation of the great ideal we were striving for.

What particularly struck me during this period was the boundless wealth of the Orange Free State. Where all the cattle came from after the immense devastation by the enemy was beyond my comprehension. We never were in want of grain, notwithstanding the tens of thousands of tons of wheat and maize destroyed or rendered unfit for consumption by the British. And when on a few farms in the grain districts and elsewhere there was still some wheat over, the fields were again waving, and at the harvest time they stood yellow for reaping. The problem of clothing was also solved. I saw several overcoats made from sheepskins, which answered well. Some burghers wore complete

suits made of leather. When one's clothes wore out they were mended with patches of leather, and then the garments were called "armoured" coats or pairs of trousers. Besides this, money was taken to Basutoland, and great quantities of clothing were bought and secretly brought to the Free State. This was constantly done notwithstanding the strict vigilance of the enemy.

And then there was the "shaking out" of soldiers; that is, when a soldier was captured his clothes were taken from him and worn by such burghers as needed them.

Who will condemn this action?

The enemy had not only cut off all our means of import, so that we were completely isolated, but had done their utmost to burn our clothes wherever they could. Whenever, then, a soldier fell into our hands, the English supplied us with a suit of clothes.

They provided us in the same way with ammunition. Since the commencement of 1901 the scarcity of ammunition had caused us much anxiety. Many who were loyal began to ask with misgivings whether this would not ultimately force us to surrender. But our enemy supplied us. In the later stages of the war we had scarcely any ammunition at all, except what we got from England. We were completely dependent on Great Britain, who took care that we should never be wholly in need. As President Steyn wrote to the Transvaal Government: "After every fight we had enough ammunition to commence another with." Towards the end of the war one seldom saw burghers armed with Mausers. The enemy were fought with their own rifles and their own ammunition. Has this often happened in the history of the world? Sunday, 15th of September, was the day fixed by Lord Kitchener on which the officers and men were given a last opportunity to lay down their arms without

detriment to themselves. The day came, and who had surrendered? I only heard of two cases in the districts of Vrede and Harrismith. Besides these, General Brand reported that about twenty men from his districts had gone to the enemy. I also heard of one or two cases in other parts of our country. The proclamation thus was of little effect. There had been a time when the Boers fell like ripe grain before the scythe of British proclamations. That time was passed, and the big words and threats of Lord Kitchener were now of no effect.

This must be attributed partly to the fact that Lord Roberts had not acted in good faith in relation to what he had promised in his proclamations; but the chief cause of the firmness of the burghers now was owing, as General de Wet used to say, to the men having been "sifted": the chaff was gone, the wheat had remained. The winds of destruction and the rain-torrents of devastation had finished their work of attrition on the mountain of African-derdom. The soft loose soil had been washed away, only the bed-rock remained.

And what shall I say of those—our own flesh and blood—who went over to the enemy?

Renegades!—What can I say?

That most of them gave up their arms to the enemy in moments of despondency I can understand, for I, too, know what dejection is; but that there were others who drew sword for the English and against us is hard to understand.

But the traitor, God will punish. It must not, however, be forgotten that it is not unprecedented in an unformed nation for the faint-hearted to desert to the enemy. Such a nation still lacks the powerful *esprit de corps* which is born of the traditions of the past. There were thousands of deserters, traitors, and renegades amongst the Americans during their great struggle.

But the fierce flame of this war has welded us together. The war with England towers in our past as something mighty and heroic. The future must always be influenced by it, and our children, looking back, will realise how close the ties are between themselves and their fathers, and thereby they will be drawn together into one united people.

CHAPTER XXI

HOW THE PRESIDENT PASSED HIS TIME

ON Sunday, 29th September 1901, I held services in the house of Mr. Gerrit Aveling at Wagenmakers Vlei, after having, during the past week, addressed the burghers in different parts of the district of Vrede. It was my intention now to visit my own congregation, and I had already written to Commandant Meyer to arrange for the holding of services for his men. But this could not take place. The English had already marched out of Harrismith, and on Monday we heard that they had arrived in the neighbourhood of Sandhurst, the farm of Mr. Hermanus Wessels. The people living in the vicinity of where I was immediately took to flight, and I temporarily joined the company of Mr. Jan Adendorf.

On Tuesday the English came as far as the farm of Mr. Adendorf, Christina, and from there a small number of them went to Natal, while the rest were sent about seizing cattle everywhere and otherwise conducting themselves after their wont. They did not, however, burn down houses now, but where they found property that the owners had carried out of their houses and hidden, they consigned this to the flames.

My son was now taken prisoner by the English, along with Assistant Field-Cornet Gert van Deventer, and the Burgher Thys Uys. He had remained behind to fight. One evening it appeared that the

English were retiring from Ottershoek to Brakfontein, and Field-Cornet van Deventer thought it was safe enough to sleep in a house. He with the two others therefore went to the homestead of Mrs. Swart. But there was a Kaffir there who saw them, and when it got dark he went and informed the English. The consequence was that at daylight the following morning these three, together with the two little sons of Mrs. Swart, were taken prisoners. The news was brought me when I was not far from Woodside. It may be imagined that after my son and I had been chums for so long I felt very lonely. But I was more anxious about him than about myself, because I knew that he would be uneasy about me. It was some consolation, however, that he had been captured and not killed. Meanwhile I had almost without noticing got into a women's laager. During the flight the company in which one finds oneself keeps increasing in numbers—*vires acquirit eundo.* And now I thought that it was not advisable to remain in a women's laager; for I did not wish to expose myself to the chance of being captured again in the same manner as on the 6th of June at Graspan. Therefore, on the day after the news reached me of my son's capture, I took leave of the good friends with whom I had spent some days, and went to General Wessels. I arrived there the following day, having spent the night at the farm of Mr. Kootje Muller.

Others of the English had meanwhile come from Standerton and reached Woodside; and before I was well aware of it I was again one of a number of fugitives. Separating myself from them, when I learnt that the English had retired from Woodside, I soon found myself, now for the third time, again in a laager of women. This laager was a Harrismith one, under Ex-Commandant Truter and Mr. James

Howell. I now thought that I should be able to accompany this laager to the district of Harrismith, and thus realise my wish to visit my own congregation. But in this I was again disappointed, for on Tuesday, the 15th of October, we nearly drove into the English, who were at Newmarket. I therefore left them, and for the present gave up the idea of visiting the Harrismith people. An incorrect report, stating that the English were advancing from Frankfort up the Wilge River, prevented my crossing that river, as I had intended to do, and I remained the fellow-fugitive of Mr. Piet de Jager for a week. From his farm I then went to his brother's, Michal de Jager, and when I had been there two days I heard from the President. He wrote me a letter wherein he informed me where I should find him. I started immediately, and on the 24th of October I arrived in his laager, and resolved, at his friendly request, to remain with him.

Life was now again the old commando life that I had not known since January. We knew of no roof but that which spreads over all the earth. On the grass we spent our time, sitting by our carts or saddles, or lying down where we happened to be. We ate, drank, and slept under the open sky. It did sometimes happen that the housewives invited their President to their tables, and that such invitations were not declined; but he never went to sleep in a house unless rainy weather forced him to do so. And even this was not done whenever the enemy was in the vicinity.

Commandant van Niekerk constantly received reports from his outposts, which were placed at a certain distance from the laager. They always kept him informed as to the movements of the enemy, and he made the little laager shift every evening according to circumstances. We very seldom slept at the same place on two consecutive nights, and

thus, in spite of ourselves, had to undergo the penalty of wandering. To be always ready for what might happen, the horses were brought from the veld every morning at two o'clock and held until the patrols brought a report later in the morning that all was safe.

The President's horse stood ready saddled from that hour. The President never took off his boots at night, and was therefore ready every moment to mount his horse. I always took off my boots at night, unless the enemy was very near. But I was more circumspect with regard to the safety of my MS. I never let it off my person. I made a little bag of old linen, placed my MS. in it, and wore it under my waistcoat, whenever the English were approaching. If anything should happen there would be a chance, provided the enemy did not "shake me out," that my book would not be lost for the second time as at Graspan.

The distance which we "trekked" every night depended upon how far we were away from the English. If they were far away, we only travelled three or four miles; if they came nearer, we were sometimes obliged to push on during the whole night in order to pass through between them or to get round them.

So I again led the old commando life. But though we were exposed to much discomfort, the time passed rapidly, especially as we had something to read in the laager. Newspapers, picked up where the English had camped, reached us from all sides. And before the carts were done away with, we carried on them a small library. Here is an incomplete catalogue of our books: *Krieg und Frieden*, a German translation of Tolstoi's *War and Peace*, *Anna Karénina*, some books of poetry, a book on physics, a history of the American War, some theological works, a little book containing extracts from Seneca in English, a

biography of Savonarola. My pastime was writing. I was incessantly sitting cramped at the seat of my cart writing my notes.

Yes, the time passed rapidly! Before we were aware of it a week was gone, and Sunday with its divine service had come. This consoled me, for the thought constantly occurred to me that we were not crawling but flying towards the end.

CHAPTER XXII

A DESPATCH FROM THE GOVERNMENT OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN REPUBLIC

I HAD hardly arrived in President Steyn's laager when I heard of a proclamation issued by him, in consultation with the Council of War, dated the 2nd of November 1901, whereby it was made lawful that boys of fourteen years old, when their physical condition and health permitted, should be "commandeered."

It was as if a sword had pierced my heart when I heard of this proclamation. Our Government had signalled that the Fatherland expected not only every man, but also every child to do his duty.

It was at this time, perhaps in consequence of this proclamation, that the English began to tear away little boys from their mothers, and not only those of fourteen and over, but also those under that age; even children of eight were mercilessly dragged away.

Immediately after I had joined the President his laager proceeded in the direction of Lindley. We had now an opportunity of visiting our hospital under the charge of Dr. Fourie, at the farm of Mr. David Malan. Then we went in the direction of Senekal to meet General Kritzinger, who had been driven over the border of the Cape Colony by General French, and was now staying in the Free State to let his horses rest a while. On Sunday, the 3rd of November, we held service, near Biddulphs-

berg, on the farm of Mr. Leendert Muller, and there General Kritzinger was also present. The President then resolved to be at Little Clocolan on the following Sunday, to address the colonists under Kritzinger on the occasion of divine service being held. This took place at the farm of Mrs. Bornman. On our way thither something occurred which caused some uneasiness to the President and the members of the Executive Council. General de Wet sent a report after him, stating that a letter had arrived from the Transvaal, and he asked President Steyn to fix a place where the Executive Council could meet for the purpose of considering that letter. The President fixed on the house of Christoffel de Jager at Sand River, and rode back twelve miles to that spot.

The letter in question asked whether we should not again try to enter into negotiations with the British Government, and to make a proposal for Peace. The Transvaal Government proposed that as a basis of negotiation there might be discussed such points as equal rights for the Dutch and English languages, religious liberty, costs of the war, an offensive and defensive alliance as far as South Africa was concerned, etc.

President Steyn replied on behalf of the Executive Council, that in his reply to Lord Kitchener he had already proposed to negotiate upon the condition that the Republics should retain their independence, and that the result was well known. Further, he said that he could not discuss all the points suggested by the Transvaal Government *seriatim*, but if there was to be a proposal for an offensive or defensive alliance with England, then we might as well recall the Deputation from Europe.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE PRESIDENT RETURNS TO THE PLAINS

WE had a pleasant time in the grain districts. There was an abundance of bread and no scarcity of slaughter-cattle. We also found wild-honey in the fissures of the rocks. Everything looked fresh and full of life in the early spring. The veld was green, and the trees heavily laden with young fruit gave promise of a good harvest. All the wheat-fields looked splendid, and at many places we noticed that people would reap where they had not sown; for everywhere there were fields where the seed which had fallen on the ground the previous year had again sprouted and was growing luxuriantly enough to be harvested. What a beautiful mountainous country the "Conquered Territory" is! Is it not the Crown of the Orange Free State?

We spent a pleasant time; but it could not continue, as we were in danger of English columns which were constantly marching to and fro from Winburg to Bethlehem. One of these columns, which was just then passing from Bethlehem to Senekal, took our only Africander medical man, Dr. Fourie, prisoner in his hospital at the farm of David Malan. We should now have been wholly without a doctor if Mr. Poutsma, who on the occasion of General de Wet's second attempt to enter the Cape Colony had been captured by the English, had not cast in his lot with us again. The English had let him return to Holland, and now he had come back from there to

South Africa. He was welcomed by us, and the house of Mrs. de Jager at the farm Bezuidenhout's Drift on Wilge River was arranged as a hospital for him.

We could not then remain in the "Conquered Territory." We therefore resolved to return to the plains around Lindley and Reitz. On Sunday, the 10th of November, we were on the farm of Mr. Claesens, near Wonder Kop, and I held service under the trees in the garden there for the burghers, and for two large women's laagers, that were fleeing for fear of the English.

Three days after we were at the farm of Mr. W. Prinsloo. Here General de Wet visited the President, and a meeting of the Executive Council was held.

The General informed the President here that it was his intention to form a large flying commando for service against the English wherever an opportunity offered. This commando was to consist of burghers from Bethlehem under General Prinsloo and Commandant Olivier; and, further, of men from Heilbron under Commandant van Coller; Kroonstad, under Commandant Celliers; Ladybrand, under Commandant Koen; Vrede, under Commandant Botha; and the Transvaalers who were at that time in Harrismith district, under Commandant Mears.

General de Wet left in the afternoon, and in the evening we trekked towards Wit Kop, and halted for the night on the ledges near Mr. Krog's farm, between Wit Kop and Wonder Kop.

The English were once more on the road from Winburg to Senekal, and Commandant van Niekerk intended passing round their front; but just as he was on the point of doing this, a false report was brought him that a force of English was also approaching Senekal from Harrismith, and that they had got as far as Rexford.

The Commandant now determined to pass round

the rear of the enemy, and a start was made in the afternoon. We had not, however, progressed very far before we learned that the report that the English were at Rexford was untrue. Commandant van Niekerk now decided to carry out his original intention, and the commando returned to the ledges by a round-about way.

The following day, Sunday, the commando again proceeded, passing over Driekuil and to the east of Tafel Kop, where we halted until dark.

In the clear moonlight we then went on, passing east of Biddulphsberg, and at eleven o'clock we were near Leendert Muller's farm. There an occurrence took place which afforded a slight change in the monotony of the night march. Our scouts, who rode about two hundred yards ahead, saw two horsemen riding towards them and put them to flight. They were very nearly fired upon, but luckily both parties perceived betimes that they were friends.

The two men proved to be burghers, who, along with some others, had charge of a women's laager not far off. They told us that on the west the English from Winburg had advanced as far as the farm of Christoffel de Jager—which fact we were aware of ourselves—and that to the east there were others from Bethlehem, at Scheur Klip; and furthermore, that there were British camps in front of us at Blauw Kopje and elsewhere.

It was now too dangerous to go on, and there was nothing to be done but to return, which we did. And when the eastern sky was reddening with the light of dawn, we were back on the farm Driekuil.

It was lucky for us that we did this, for on Tuesday morning the English from Bethlehem made a sortie towards Kaffir's Kop, which lay directly in our route. We remained in the neighbourhood of Driekuil till Thursday, 28th November, and then rode through the night over Pietersdal, Bester's Kop, and across the

Bethlehem road, till we reached the farm Nooitgedacht, near Kaffir's Kop.

On the following morning we were in the immediate vicinity of a fight which General de Wet was having with the English not far south of Lindley. He arrested their progress, and they retired that night to the farm of Caspar Kruger at Victoria Spruit.

On the following day the English had disappeared in the direction of Heilbron, abandoning five waggons. These waggons were loaded with flour, sugar, tobacco, blankets and tents.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE ENGLISH LAY WASTE THE COUNTRY ABOUT LINDLEY

IT was in the beginning of December that we returned to the plains, and on the 3rd and 4th the President visited the great flying commando at Lindley. On the second day he addressed the men.

Here we met Judge Hertzog, who had come from the western districts to discuss some important matters with President Steyn. He remained with the President, while he awaited an answer to a letter written to the Transvaal with relation to his visit there.

A service was to be held in the town on Sunday, the 8th of December. Instead of this a fight took place there. The English were seen early on that day advancing from Valsch River bridge.

General de Wet gave orders that one portion of the burghers should take up positions on either side of the Kroonstad road, and the others a position to the east of it, near the Plat Kopje. I witnessed the whole affair. The enemy were in overwhelming force, and slowly advanced in widely extended order. It was impossible for our men to hold their positions. The burghers on the Kroonstad road were the first to give way. They took up positions on the kopjes where, more than a year before, the Yeomanry had surrendered. Shortly after the men on the right flank at the Plat Kop had also to retire. I then saw large numbers of the English come out over the

ridges. How few our little groups of burghers seemed in comparison to the large numbers that made their appearance there. Everything was now in the power of the English. They could bombard the Yeomanry kopjes, and our burghers had to desert them also. It was not long before the whole commando was in full retreat towards Elandsfontein.

During the next couple of days the English did as they liked, without any resistance being offered them. They went about everywhere in the neighbourhood, devastated the farms, and took away the cattle with which our people had not fled.

When the President returned there on the 16th of December, after the departure of the English, I heard from the women how sadly things had gone. They were, it is true, not taken away, but they were driven out of their houses, and had to see their dwellings burnt down or destroyed before their very eyes. Could inhumanity go further? If the English did not wish to exterminate us, what then did they mean by driving weak women and children out of doors and destroying the houses? All the food of the women was carried away or scattered upon the ground; and it was only through the kind-heartedness of here and there a more humane officer, or of some simple "Tommy," that a dish of flour was secretly left behind for the housewife. What made everything still more sad was the great service rendered by traitorous Africanders as guides to the enemy.

Mrs. Gert van Niekerk of Windbult told me what had happened to her before the eyes of one of these, Ex-General Piet de Wet. Alas! that I should have to record it, but—

"'Tis true, 'tis pity,
And pity 'tis, 'tis true."

These Africanders made it possible for the English to travel long distances at night, and, acquainted as they were with the habits of their countrymen, they

enabled the English to capture Boers, and to seize cattle, where otherwise they would have been unable to do so, or at least could not have done so without infinitely more trouble. How must every noble sentiment have been stifled in these men! It is impossible to comprehend how they could have endured listening to the constant abuse which in the camps was heaped on their own race—incomprehensible how they could constantly, from one farm to another, look on the misery which they were helping to bring upon women and children—who were their own flesh and blood.

From Mrs. Niekerk, then, I heard how she had fared. The English came to the farm Windbult about ten o'clock on the 10th of December, and immediately began to strike the doors, windows, and furniture with axes and hammers, smashing and demolishing everything. If Mrs. van Niekerk attempted to save anything it was snatched from her hands and broken to atoms. But her daughter, helped by an Africander serving under the English, succeeded in carrying out some beds, chairs, and smaller articles.

Meanwhile ex-General de Wet carried on a conversation with Mrs. van Niekerk, whom he had formerly, as her neighbour, known very intimately. This conversation ran nearly as follows:—

P. de Wet. Do tell the burghers that it is a lost cause. Try to persuade them that they are blindly going astray.

Mrs. v. Niekerk. I will do no such thing.

P. de Wet. It is against the Bible to continue the war; for we read that a king must consider if with ten thousand men he is able to meet his opponent who is coming against him with twenty thousand.

Mrs. v. Niekerk. But, Piet, you were a Commandant yourself; what did you think of our small numbers against our mighty foe then?

P. de Wet. My eyes were opened later. I have seen my mistake. . . . But it is just Christian de Wet and old Steyn who keep the thing going by telling lies to the burghers.

Mrs. van Niekerk had meanwhile kept her eyes constantly fixed on the soldiers who were destroying her property. Pointing at the ruins, she appealed to such sense of right as she thought might still be left in the man, for whom in happier days she had had much respect, and asked: "Are you not ashamed, Piet? See how you are ruining us."

And what was his reply?—What? I do not know how to describe it, so feeble it was,—this: "And why do you ruin England so?"

The conversation continued as follows:—

P. de Wet. The country is lost.

Mrs. v. Niekerk. No, the country is not lost. You are masters for the moment wherever your camps stand. Elsewhere the burghers do what they like and go wherever they choose.

P. de Wet. Wait a bit, till the 200,000 men who are still to come from England are here, and the blockhouses which are to be built from town to town are completed.—Aunt, do tell the burghers what I now tell to you—All is lost. Do tell the burghers so.

Mrs. v. Niekerk. I will not do so. Besides, it would be in vain.

Involuntarily she thought of days gone by, when the man who now stood before her came to her house under conditions so entirely different. "Oh Piet," she said, "have we not prayed together, you and I, in our prayer-meetings, in this very house, that is now being turned into a heap of ruins? Alas! the image which I then saw in you, I see no more. You have forsaken God."

"No," he said; "all of you have done that. And as regards prayer-meetings, every Sunday we do that.

. . . But the consciences of the burghers who are still fighting have become seared."

The house was destroyed; where the doors and windows were, yawning openings gaped. The beams were sawn down, a partition wall thrown down, and the roof fell in,—all this in the presence of Mrs. van Niekerk and Piet de Wet.

The poor woman then went to an outer storehouse, but the English would not allow her to remain there, and she took refuge in a miserable hut used for storing dry cow-dung for fuel.

But on the following day she had to move out of there too, as the enemy said they needed the place to fire from. And so she and her daughter were now stranded on her own premises without the least protection from wind or weather.

But this did not last long. The English ordered her and her daughter to get into a waggon, saying that they would take her to Kroonstad. This, however, they did not do; but informed her on the road, that they would leave her with a woman, and in the afternoon made her alight at the house of Field-Cornet Thÿs de Beer.

This building was in flames, and Mrs. de Beer was outside with her children, one of whom was a sick baby. The women and children spent that night in a small lean-to, which luckily had not been burnt down.

When Mrs. van Niekerk's son, Jurie, rode to their house on the same day, to see how his mother was doing, some English were concealed in the hut where the fuel was kept. They allowed him to approach, and one of the soldiers called out, "Hands up!" "Hands up, you!" said Jurie van Niekerk, and fired his revolver at them. But there were too many ready for him, and he immediately fell, mortally wounded, by three bullets.

The day after, his father, Gert van Niekerk, re-

turned to his house. He was quite alone, and viewed the ruin of his home. But who shall describe his thoughts when he—standing there all alone—found the still unburied corpse of his son! The English returned, after having killed a great many sheep and taken much cattle. Still, great numbers of cattle were saved by the burghers at night.

Dingaan's Day with its memories of happy rejoicings once more arrived. I had ridden to be with the commando on that day, but wherever I came I always found that it had moved away before me, so that I could celebrate the day with but a small number of people.

On the 17th of December the President was on the left bank of Tijger Kloof, and it was there that the news of Commandant Hasebroek's death reached him. A few days later we learnt that on the 16th of December he unexpectedly encountered a number of English, and that, while galloping away from them, he received a bullet through his head. So he too had given his life for his country's freedom!

Posterity will keep the memory of the gallant Commandant green. He was a man of noble character. Opposed to all hypocrisy, he was frank and open-hearted, and never hesitated to express his opinions fearlessly to anyone, whoever he might be. He was the idol of his men, and looked after their wants as if they were his children. He was ever the first to enter a position—the last to leave it. He was a tower of strength to our cause; when nearly everyone was discouraged at Nauwpoort, his courage never wavered. If it had not been for him and a mere handful of others like him, who knew not what it was to despair, our whole fighting force would have surrendered to the enemy like cowards. Brave, resolute Commandant, I reverently lay a wreath upon your grave!

Before I bring this chapter to a close, I must add

that when President Steyn was retiring from Lindley he had received a letter from Lord Kitchener (in consequence of a letter from Vice-President Schalk Burger to Lord Salisbury, in which he complained about the removal and ill-treatment of our women and the bad treatment they received in the camps). Lord Kitchener wrote on the 1st December 1901 to the two Presidents, and said, amongst other things, that as the Presidents complained of the treatment of women and children, and as they must therefore be able to look after them, he had the honour to inform them that all women and children at present in his camps who were willing to leave, would be sent to the Presidents. Lord Kitchener said he would be pleased to hear where the Presidents desired the women and children to be handed to them.

President Steyn answered that he could not receive them, especially as Lord Kitchener had not only had all the houses destroyed, but also the bedding of the women and children.

CHAPTER XXV

TWO IMPORTANT ENGAGEMENTS

WE passed to the south-east of Reitz and came to the farm Inloop, belonging to Mr. Gert van Rensburg. On our way thither I left the commando to go to the office of Landdrost Serfontein, in order to visit the unfortunate de Lange there, who was sentenced to death by a court-martial for high treason. I found him in very sad circumstances; but he was sustained by religion. He passed all his time in prayer and in reading the Bible.

Unfortunately his sentence was not carried out on the appointed day. He was taken to Reitz, his grave was ready, everything was prepared for the enactment of the sad tragedy; but the persons who had to carry out the sentence did not appear. Two days later, on the 21st of December, he was shot while kneeling before his grave in prayer.

General Wessel Wessels had been charged with the sending of a party of men to execute the sentence, but on that day when this had to be done all his attention was occupied by the English near Tafel Kop. The English were busy building blockhouses from the Drakensberg to Vrede, and General Wessels was waiting for an opportunity to attack them. On the following day the opportunity came. There were three forces of British, when General Wessels, supported by the Commandants Ross and Botha, gave orders that one of these

forces should be attacked. He had about a hundred and thirty or forty men, while the force attacked were in far greater numbers, and were provided besides with two Armstrong guns, two Maxim-Nordenfeldts, and one Maxim.

Our burghers galloped over a bare plain for nearly three and a half miles, up to the enemy, who were on a kopje. The English let them come up to six hundred yards, and then opened fire on them with shrapnel. Their Maxims also and their rifles came into play. But the burghers were not to be checked. Soon they were so close that they silenced the guns by shooting down the gunners. They then charged up close to the enemy, and there were in some cases hand-to-hand encounters, some of the combatants striking one another with their rifle-butts.

The English were stubborn and fought very bravely; but in a short time everything was in the hands of our burghers. Some of the English took to flight, and very many were killed and wounded.

All the field-pieces were now in possession of General Wessels; but before they could be got away, one of the other two columns turned up from the direction of Paardenberg. This force was repulsed thrice, and our burghers would have got off with the guns had not the third force appeared from the direction of Wilge River.

The only thing to be done now was to gallop out, and abandon the captured cannon. This was only done with the greatest difficulty. The one column was a thousand yards to the right, and the other a hundred to the left; some of the troops were already immediately in front of our men. But fortunately they got through without casualty. Unhappily, however, five men had been killed and four wounded in the storming of the kopje.

Immediately after Assistant Commandant de Kock came in contact on the farm Beginsel with the column, which had come up as a reinforcement from Wilge River. He undoubtedly caused them some considerable loss, for five ambulance waggons were later on busy with the casualties there. Commandant de Kock had, however, also to retire before this column, after he had engaged it for an hour and a half, because a reinforcement made its appearance, and directed the fire of their cannon at him. He had no casualties. We found out afterwards that the force which General Wessels attacked was that under Major Damant, while the one that attacked Commandant de Kock was commanded by Colonel Rimington.

Christmas Day had come again. I was not so low-spirited as on the last celebration of this memorable day. This must be ascribed to the fact that we spent the day pleasantly at Liebenberg's Vlei at the house of Mr. Juri Kemp. I could never have believed that, after a long struggle of two years and two months, we should be able to see such abundance on a table as that which Mrs. Kemp and her daughters provided there. It could not have been surpassed in times of peace. Notwithstanding the want of sugar, the sweet was not absent. The bees had supplied that. It did us good, in the midst of our troubles, to enjoy some pleasant hours, and we did not forget the religious character of the day. In the morning we held service at "Fanny's home," and in the afternoon at Mr. Kemp's house.

In the midst of all this joy I did not know that my son was dead eleven days. It was the same thing over again that evening when we, at some distance from this pleasant scene, were ready again to retire to rest on the grass. Before we did so a rumour came that General de Wet had captured a camp of the enemy early that morning. His report of this

event reached the President the following morning. From this report, and from what I heard from the mouths of many who were in the fight, I give the following account of the attack :—

The English were building blockhouses from Harrismith to Bethlehem, and their advance force, 580 strong, under command temporarily of Major Williams, was camped at Groenkop on the farm Tweefontein in the district of Bethlehem. General de Wet had, since he had collected the large commando, sought for an opportunity to come in contact with the enemy. After what had occurred at Lindley, and a fight later near Langberg, which however had not been a success for us, he had as yet done nothing. When, however, Christmas was approaching, he thought that it would be the right time for him to act, and the force at Groenkop drew his attention. He reconnoitred himself, and resolved to make an attack on the night between the 24th and 25th December. He gave the necessary orders late in the night of the 24th, and General Prinsloo and the Commandants marched out with him to the hill.

It was a bright moonlit night, and there was some danger that the advancing force might be seen from above long before the hill could be reached. But fortunately there were clouds floating in the air, which everywhere threw shadows upon the plain, over which the commando had to pass, and it reassured the burghers when they thought that the several divisions might look from the hills like patches of shadow below. There were dongas near the foot of the hill. Our men passed safely through these, and a little farther on they dismounted and began the ascent.

It was then two o'clock in the morning. The Heilbron and Kroonstad burghers, under the Commandants van Coller and Celliers, ascended on the left towards the north, whilst the men of Bethlehem, under General Prinsloo and Commandant Olivier,

formed the right wing. In the centre were the men of Vrede and Harrismith, under Commandants Hermanus Botha and Jan Jacobsz, together with Commandant Mears and his men. The burghers were in the best of spirits. They climbed the hill, the one striving to pass the other. "It was splendid to see how they charged," one man said to me. "They went up like a swarm of locusts." There were three encampments of sandstone over which our men had to pass before they could get to the top. Over the first they had clambered, when there came the usual "Halt! who goes there?" Then the sound of a whistle was heard, and immediately thereupon the enemy began to fire. Our burghers advanced with all the more determination over the other two ledges of sandstone, shouting, "Merry Christmas," etc., and rushed upon the entrenchments. The English fired twice with grapeshot and several times with the Maxim-Nordenfeldt, but those who were serving the guns were killed, wounded, or forced to surrender, as was the case with one who was just putting a belt into the Maxim-Nordenfeldt. The forts were soon taken, excepting one on the right hand, and it was from it that most of our burghers who fell were shot; as soon, however, as General Prinsloo noticed the heavy fire from that fort, he stormed and soon silenced it.

Our burghers now fired on the tents, and many English were killed and wounded in them. Many also fled half dressed from the tents, forming, as they ran, movable targets for our men.

"Within half an hour," so General de Wet stated in his report, "all the forts were taken, and the cannon and the whole of the camp were in our hands. The enemy fled, fighting all the while, to at least two or three hundred yards outside their camp, and the fight continued for another hour and a half. . . . I must say that I have never seen better fighting

against an entrenched place. Our officers and burghers literally marched right through the camp. The booty consisted of a 15-pounder Armstrong, a Maxim-Nordenfeldt, a Maxim, and many Lee-Metford rifles. Much ammunition, twenty-seven waggons, laden with all kinds of provision; overcoats, blankets, and about 500 horses and mules were captured." Poor Tommy!—Yes, let me speak tenderly of him, however I might otherwise express myself when speaking in the abstract of the English people, or in the concrete of Chamberlain, Milner, and many officers of the British army,—poor Tommy had received his plum-pudding, tobacco, and new uniform (Christmas presents), and on the evening before he had made a parcel of them and laid it at his pillow with the object of putting it on and enjoying it in the morning. For many a Tommy the morning light did not dawn, and for not one of them came the enjoyment of his Christmas fare.

Our loss was considerable. "We have," so General de Wet reported, "to mourn the loss of fourteen men—heroes!—dead; amongst whom are the gallant Commandant Olivier of Bethlehem, Field-Cornet M. Lourens of the ward, Lower Bethlehem, and Assistant Field-Cornet Jan Dalebout of Harrismith." Besides Field-Cornet Dalebout I personally had to lament the death of another Harrismith man, Jacob Kok.

The number of our wounded was 32. The loss of the enemy was great: 24 were taken prisoners, and, excepting the few who succeeded in escaping, the rest were either wounded or killed. Major Williams was also amongst the killed.

General Brand and Commandant Coetzee, who had just come from the west on a visit to General de Wet, took part in the fight, and their services were highly valued by the General.

At eight o'clock an English reinforcement came

from Elands River bridge; but by that time our people had already gone off with the booty. The prisoners-of-war were partially "shaken out" and sent over the Basuto border.

Prisoners-of-war released!—What a strange war this war of ours was. We had no ammunition but that which we got from the enemy; hardly any clothes but those provided us by our adversaries. And when we took soldiers prisoners, then—they were set free!

CHAPTER XXVI

OUR CASE GROWS MORE AND MORE DESPERATE

BLOCKHOUSES were also erected in the northern and south-eastern portions of the Orange Free State. One line from Kroonstad to Lindley was finished towards the middle of December; another from Botha's Pass to Vrede and Frankfort at the end of the year; and a third from Harrismith to Bethlehem shut off, with the portion that had already been built from Fouriesburg to Bethlehem, the grain districts behind Nauwpoort, about the middle of January 1902. People had all kinds of ideas about these blockhouses. Some thought that they did not signify much, and might be compared to the flags which are sometimes planted in front of a flock of sheep. At first the sheep remain within the line, but soon they find that the flags form no insuperable barrier, and then they graze up to, and then to the other side of the flags. Others again could not conceal their fears. The English, they thought, were making the circle narrower, and we should eventually have to flee from place to place until we were overtaken and overwhelmed by superior forces. We soon found that there was truth in both views. The circle was drawn closer and closer. If the English columns were marching about, we had to keep our horses tied at nights to be ready every moment to retire to the right or to the left, so as not to be driven against

the blockhouses, or we had to retreat before the enemy until near some line of blockhouses, and then suddenly face about and either pass between our pursuers or go round them. On the other hand, the danger of the blockhouses was not so great as had been feared. Burghers could always pass them on horseback, and sometimes they even did so with carts and herds of cattle.

1902.

The New Year had again come; and with the year new trouble and ever-increasing distress. It was not easy for us, in spite of all that had thus constantly gone against us, to remain hopeful. Now and then we read something in the newspapers, picked up on the spots where the English had encamped, that encouraged us somewhat. What we read of Anglophobia in Germany would cheer us up a little and revive the expectation in us that the war would soon be over. But when we would read in the same papers that the English Government was resolved to continue the war at all costs, and when we were constantly eye-witnesses of the uncivilised manner in which the troops carried on the war, then, as far at least as I was concerned, there appeared to be no prospect of a speedy termination—no sign in our clouded sky that the storm was breaking. "Watchman," so I seemed to cry, "what of the night? what of the night?" and it was as if I always received the answer: "The morning has come, and yet it is night."

What especially did not tend to encourage was the increasing violence with which the English continued their destructive work. This took place in the districts to the east of Lindley, chiefly in the month from 10th January to 10th February. Especially was this the case where the column of Colonel Rimington passed.

Colonel Rimington now passed through portions of the districts of Bethlehem and Harrismith, in the neighbourhood of Reitz. When he came to a farm-house, the first questions of his officers and soldiers to the housewife were, "Where is your husband? Where is de Wet? Where is Steyn? Where are the Boers?" The woman could honestly reply that she did not know, whereupon they threatened to burn down her house, if she gave no information; and while the conversation was still going on she was summarily ordered to carry out her bedding; the soldiers would then with loaded guns and fixed bayonets storm into the house to seek for Boers, under the beds and in clothes presses. They then smashed the looking-glasses, so that the Boers should make no heliographs of them. Further, they took everything they wanted to: pillow-cases to serve as bags for fruit, etc., sheets, knives and forks, even when these had already been carried out along with the bedding. Pots and pans the housewife might in no case retain, even all the dishes and plates were smashed. Worse still, the woman was robbed of all her food; what the soldiers could not eat, such as flour, was thrown out upon the ground, and trodden under foot in the mud and dirt. Bread was never spared; out of the bin, from the table, or hot from the oven, it was taken, and not a crumb left behind. If there were any meat in pot and pan on the fire, then it was carried off, pot and pan and all. And thus the soldiers took the food out of the children's mouths. The mother remained behind with nothing. If she asked what she was to give her two, three, or six children to eat, the rough retort was, "Ask de Wet that?" "Never," said one woman to me, "was it so hard for me, as when my children cried to me for bread, and I had nothing to give them."

And then the soldiers would ride away to do the

same at the next house. The woman left behind at the ruins of her house, took some of the zinc plates, laid them sloping against the wall of her destroyed house, and remained there until her husband came and brought her some food, and made a dwelling for her again, as well as he was able. Besides, all this I have heard from women that fearfully insulting language was used towards them by the rude soldiers. This certainly was not indulged in by all, for, as the woman readily admitted, there were some camps which passed through that were blameless. The armed Kaffirs revelled in being able to address the women familiarly with "thou" and "thee." "Where is your (jou) husband?—If he were here now I would shoot him dead." And they marched through the house as freely as the soldiers did.

It often happened that the soldiers broke into a house late at night, and forced their way even into the bedrooms, where the women lay in bed, under pretext of hunting for hidden Boers.

On the 10th of January the column of Colonel Rimington came to our hospital at Bezuidenhout's Drift. Notwithstanding that Dr. Poutsma had been allowed by Lord Kitchener to come and practise amongst us, and that the Red Cross flag was displayed that morning, as usual, over two of the buildings, and over the ambulance waggon, some soldiers stormed the hospital. This is what Dr. Poutsma, *inter alia*, says in an affidavit: "In and around the building shots were fired, and about fifteen yards from me, at the back door, a horseman dismounted, and kneeling down fired at me. 'Hands up!' he cried, and notwithstanding that I was, of course, unarmed, and moreover had put up my hands, he continued firing, whereupon I fled into the house. When I got to the kitchen some shots were sent after me, but wonderful to relate, without the intended result, as was the case also with six revolver shots which a captain fired partly at

me, partly into the kitchen, and partly into the large sick ward. The captain in question, whose name is unknown to me, was so disappointed at all his shots having missed me, that he sprang towards me with the empty revolver, pushed it under my nose, and shouted, 'I'm damned sorry that I didn't shoot you.'

"Meanwhile the shooting inside the house continued at the three nursing-sisters, the Assistant A. van Toorenenbergen, and at me, and, most horrible of all, at the helpless wounded burghers who lay on their beds. I saw one of the soldiers outside kneeling down, and resting his gun on the window-sill he fired two shots at the wounded burgher Wessels, who, however was not hit, but was covered with dust from the wall beside him, where it was struck by the bullet."

The doctor now went to the veranda, and was there arrested by order of a major. But when the Assistant Mr. van Toorenenbergen shouted, "Doctor, Sister Rautenbach is wounded," he wrenched himself loose, and went into the large sick ward.

"I found the young lady," so Dr. Poutsma declares further, "bathed in her blood. Four bullets had frightfully mutilated her."

The shooting ceased, and the doctor bandaged Miss Rautenbach. Then some officers entered, and then came the sickening: "I am awfully sorry." When Dr. Poutsma afterwards spoke to Colonel Rimington about this occurrence, he expressed his regret that Miss Rautenbach had been wounded, but added that he would not have been sorry in the least had Dr. Poutsma been shot, as one of his own doctors had shortly before been killed by the Boers at Tafel Kop.[1] Further, he said that the Red Cross flag had not been noticed, and that he had never heard anything about a hospital there. He also wished Dr. Poutsma to

[1] This happened during a fight.

admit that all that had happened was "an accident," which, as may be supposed, was refused. Not even sacred edifices were spared. At Reitz the troops broke up the floor of the Dutch Reformed Church to make fires with. The churches at Frankfort, Ventersburg, and Lindley were burnt down.

So things went on. About our alleged misdeeds we saw reports in almost every newspaper that we picked up; but we had no opportunity to make known to the world what the English were doing to us.

The English wanted to make an end to the war. They tried all means to attain this object speedily; also proclamations! but proclamations, as they had discovered, had had but little effect on the Boers. Especially had this been the case with regard to the one which had offered the Boers a chance of laying down their arms up to the 15th of September. What other plan could they now devise to end the struggle which, notwithstanding all this devastation, still continued, and appeared likely to continue indefinitely? Surely not another proclamation? No, but a letter! Lord Kitchener wrote a letter, an extract from which was, in the beginning of January 1902, left lying about for the information of the Boers on the farm where the English camps had halted. Lord Kitchener advised the Boers, in this letter, to take the matter into their own hands, because, as he asserted, President Steyn and General de Wet were resolved to ruin them utterly. The Boers should therefore act for themselves and lay down their arms, and he promised them that if they—not one by one, but in small numbers,—a corporal with ten men, a Field-Cornet with twenty-five, and a Commandant with fifty men—surrendered, they would then not be banished. They would, moreover, not lose their remaining cattle, and would, moreover, after the war, receive aid from the British Government to help

them up again.[1] How shameful it was that, ever since Nauwpoort, the British Government had been doing its utmost to induce the burghers to commit treason. But *all is fair in love and war* is their own motto.

This "paper bomb," however, did very little execution. As little notice was taken of it as of the recent proclamation. Our people stood firm.

That our people as a people remained steadfast became more and more evident to me. However much our numbers in South Africa may have become diminished through the deportation of great numbers, and through the still greater numbers who had lost courage and had surrendered, our people as a people still always continued to exist. This the English were anxious to deny. They were fond of asserting that it was only a small fraction of the people that still resisted. This was not the case. It is true that it

[1] The Extract was as follows :—

[Translation.]

Let the Boers know that de Wet's assertions *re* Peace and Arbitration are utter falsehoods, and that it is my opinion that de Wet and Steyn, having nothing to lose, wish to ruin the Boers utterly. If they (the Boers) desire to have peace, we are ready ; and the only means I can see to bring this about is for the burghers to take this matter into their own hands, and to elect about two or three representatives to meet me on this subject, when I feel assured we could so arrange it that they should not lose the rest of their property and cattle. We shall be glad, when the war is over, to help them as far as possible with their farming operations. It is my wish to see the burghers with their wives and children back at their farms. Their losses are the fault of their leaders, who are responsible for urging them on to continue a struggle which they know to be useless. If they follow these men, further destruction of their property is unavoidable ; if they take the matter into their own hands, I feel certain that we can arrange matters ; and we have the best wish to help the Boers, who have constantly been misled. I do not wish individuals to surrender, as I prefer that those who are dissatisfied shall remain out with their commandos, and should use their influence to bring about a complete and not a partial peace, so that all may return to their farms. . . . But if Boers surrender, they will not be sent away, and they will retain their property and cattle. A corporal must bring in ten armed men, a field-cornet twenty-five, and a commandant fifty men, to entitle them or admit them to such considerations.

was only a minority that were still able to continue the struggle; but the heart of the nation, as a whole, was still always faithful. The majority of our prisoners-of-war had remained loyal to the cause. The majority even of those who in their dejection laid down their arms had no desire to remain under British rule. On an earlier page I have indicated what the feeling was on the island of Ceylon, and here I wish to add something which proved to me that in the Bermudas the feeling against England was still stronger, if possible, than in Ceylon.

Shortly after I had got possession of the extract of Lord Kitchener's letter just referred to I read the following description of the prisoners at Bermuda: "Many of them (the prisoners) are irreconcilable, and show their bitterness and hostility in every way. For instance, they have refused to accept for their dead the military honours which are usually accorded the British soldier. The Boer chaplain, the Rev. J. R. Albertyn of Wellington in the Cape Colony, requested, on behalf of the men, that the coffin of a deceased burgher should not be covered with the Union Jack, and that the three volleys usually fired over the soldier's grave should be discontinued."[1]

When I read this my heart leaped for joy. Our people were still one and undivided, I thought. If there were hundreds of our flesh and blood siding with the British, then there were thousands who did not. Even those on whom the depressing influence of imprisonment must have had a baneful effect remained irreconcilable, and showed it in every way.

What also struck me, when reading the newspapers, was how England damaged her own cause; because, in her excessively overbearing attitude, she did not understand the art of being conciliatory.

[1] Reuter's correspondent at Hamilton, Bermudas, writing on the 14th September 1901.

Four colonists, rebels—so one newspaper related—were brought to the market-place at Cradock. Shortly after their arrival there the commanding officer rode up, ushered in with the music of *Rule Britannia*. Thereupon the accusations and the sentences against these four men were read. It appeared that all of them had been sentenced to death, but that the sentences of two of them had been commuted to imprisonment for life. Then a *royal salute* was fired, and the English National Anthem played by the band. What an exhibition, I thought, of England's pride! One would have thought that it was indeed *Rule Britannia* throughout South Africa. But so far it had not yet got, and the action of England there—the exhibition of the sentenced men in the market-place, the playing of the National Anthem, the firing of a *royal salute*—all that could have no other effect than to cause race hatred to strike roots still deeper, not only in the Republics, but throughout the whole of South Africa, and to drive every irreconcilable man anew to set his face like a flint against all that is English.

Ten days after Rimington's troops had committed those atrocities in the hospitals, they and several other columns came to the neighbourhood of Reitz, and were even more than usually active. They captured large numbers of cattle, and continued devastating the farms.

Their object was, however, chiefly to capture President Steyn and General de Wet, and also to regain possession of the guns taken by us at Groen Kop, which, since the 25th of December, had been conveyed about from one place to another between Liebenberg's Vlei and Wilge River. Unfortunately they succeeded in this. The guns were captured at Roode Kraal, Liebenberg's Vlei, on the 4th of February. At the same time the English drove General de Wet and a considerable number of burghers through the

line of blockhouses between Kroonstad and Lindley. The General passed through without firing a shot, but was not so fortunate when, shortly after, he returned. He then lost several burghers, dead and wounded.

After that we had rest in the neighbourhood of Reitz until the 21st of February; but of this I will give an account in a following chapter.

Saturday, the 8th of February 1902, was a sad day for me. Marthinus Snyman, who had been to Witzieshoek, heard there that my son had died at Ladysmith. On the following Monday I received a letter from my friend the Rev. J. J. Ross, who informed me that he had, about the 20th of January, received a letter from the Rev. Dieterlin containing among other things the following words: "I saw in the papers that young Charles Kestell, aged 17, died in Ladysmith; is he not the son of our friend of Harrismith?" A sword passed through my heart—But this is not the place in which I must record personal experiences of this kind.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE HOLOCAUST OF WOMEN

DURING the short period of rest in the neighbourhood of Reitz, President Steyn and Judge Hertzog were engaged, together with the other members of the Executive Council, Messrs. Brebner and Olivier, in writing letters to the sovereigns of Europe and to the President of the United States of America. These letters were intended to explain our position, and to ask whether the Powers would not exert their influence in the interests of the Boers, especially regarding matters concerning the rules of civilised warfare and the fundamental principles of international law, which were both being shamefully outraged by the English in this war.

It was intended that a messenger should be sent to Europe through German West Africa with the letters, and that he should himself, when abroad, further explain matters.

At the same time Judge Hertzog busied himself in collecting affidavits from women and others, who had suffered under the barbarity of the British soldier, and the Kaffirs in their service. I was allowed to read these declarations, and must admit that I have never perused anything more heartrending. Let me here note a few facts.

One woman declared that an English Colonel had pulled down her house over her head at Haco, in Ladybrand district, on 21st January 1902. On the 27th of the same month a patrol of the same officer

came and took her prisoner. They made her and her children walk in front of the patrol for a distance of three miles, and that when she was so far advanced in pregnancy that she gave birth to a daughter ten days later.

The wife of Commandant J. J. Koen, of the Ladybrand Commando, was taken from her house at Blanco, in the district of Ladybrand, against her will, by a patrol of Major General Knox, on 27th January 1902. The order was first given that she should go to the camp on foot with her children, of whom one was a baby of a month old. Fortunately, however, there was a cart which the English had looted that morning, and she was allowed to go in that. The night was cold and stormy, but, notwithstanding that, she had to pass it, with her children and two other women who had likewise been captured, under some trees in the open air, with very little bedding. On the following day she was brought up and cross-examined like a criminal, and this was repeated shortly after before a Colonel. This officer told her that her husband had captured eighteen of his Kaffirs the day before, and said that if her husband had those Kaffirs shot, he, the Colonel, would give the 1000 Kaffirs under his command liberty to do with her as they chose. The number of women and children had in the meanwhile increased to eighteen, and all were in the open air, without protection against wind and weather. In vain Mrs. Koen begged for a tent.

A Colonial, however, took pity on her, and spread a buck sail over the waggon under which the women and children had sought shelter from the rain. This kindly deed of the Colonial displeased the Colonel, and he severely took him to task about it. From Monday morning to Wednesday evening the women got nothing to eat, and again it was a Colonial who intervened. This man gave them some

raw meat, biscuits, and a little coffee and sugar. But they had themselves to provide for fuel, and that on a bare hill where there was none to be found.

From Mequatling's Nek the women and children were conveyed to the farm of the late General Ferreira, on a trolley waggon loaded with seed-oats. It rained all the while, and they were drenched to the skin. They passed the next night under a buck sail with scanty covering. After spending nine days like this, Mrs. Koen was given a broken-down cart and two lean horses to return with to her house. She found it looted.

The Colonel had made the threat not to Mrs. Koen only. When he uttered the disgraceful words to that lady, he had already written a letter to her husband from Mequatling's Nek, dated 21st January 1902, in which these words appear:—

"I request from you proof that these boys [Kaffirs captured by Commandant Koen, and afterwards sent by him to Basutoland] are safe. Should I find, on the contrary, that you have murdered them, or should you murder others, besides other penalties, which you will assuredly not escape, I warn you that it will be beyond my power to control my Kaffirs in their action towards your women. I hope, however, that your assurance, accompanied by proof, that my Kaffirs are safe, will enable me to assuage my Kaffirs, and to continue to you that protection which I have hitherto been able to grant them."

Now, I ask, suppose that Commandant Koen had shot the Colonel's Kaffirs, could such a deed justify a British officer to set loose savages upon defenceless women?

Another woman declared that on the 9th of September 1900, a soldier, a Hottentot, and two Kaffirs visited her farm, Jolly Kop, in the district of Bethlehem. The soldier remained some distance off, but the others came to her, threatened to shoot her, and forcibly removed her rings from her fingers.

Many acts of unnecessary and reckless violence took place in relation to women in very weak condition. If the columns trekking about wanted to burn a house or take a woman away from her house, they seldom took into consideration whether a woman was ill or in a weak condition. There were officers and men who had neither heart nor eye for the weakness which is generally a guarantee and protection against violence. Here is an instance.

A woman was taken from the farm Omdraai, district Bethlehem, towards the end of March 1901, when she had been delivered of a child but one day.

Another, on the farm Tijger, district Heilbron, had a child of one day old. Notwithstanding this, on 20th January 1902 Colonel Rimington had her house burned over her head, and she was forced, ill and weak as she was, to totter out of the house so as not to be consumed by the flames.

The same thing had happened on the 1st of November 1901 to a woman at Vogelstruisfontein, district Heilbron. Her child was but two days old, and she too had to save herself from the burning house. Too often in this war it happened that the courtesy to women which chivalry dictates was lacking on the part of the British. Not only were our women treated with disrespect and contempt, but this contempt was as often accompanied by a large measure of cruelty.

So, for example, it very often happened that the English fired on the houses with cannon and rifles, under the pretext that the Boers had concealed themselves in them. In many cases it turned out afterwards that these houses were occupied by women and children only, and that some of these had been wounded by the firing which had taken place.

And then, when the women were taken away, the enemy placed them on open waggons, where they had no protection from sun, wind, or rain. There

was one woman who was conveyed from her house on a gun-carriage. This took place in the middle of May 1901, on the farm Moolman's Spruit, district Vicksburg.

From other women the soldiers took all their clothing, and searched them for money they had hidden on their persons. And when the women were driven out before the soldiers, or when they were allowed to return to their homes from a camp, they not only carried their babes, but also bundles of clothing—and these were often women who had never before carried any burden. Our Africander women carrying bundles like tramps! On what *Viæ Dolorosæ* did they have to go!

Racial hatred? Who is to blame for it if it exists?

Who can blame the Africander if he cannot forget what was done to his mother, to his wife, to his sister?

In the middle of July 1901 a burgher on the top of Venter's Kroon saw an English patrol set fire to a waggon along the Vaal River. When the English had ridden off he went to the burning waggon and there found the sister of Mr. H. Miny of Vredefort burned to death. She was sixty years old, and had never in all her life been able to walk. The burgher found her about twenty yards from the waggon, with her hands before her eyes, and it would appear that she had crawled so far after the waggon had been set on fire. It may be that the English had not seen her. Let us hope that this was the case.

Much was said in the declarations about things I have spoken of in former chapters, in regard to the rough treatment the women were subjected to when the flying columns burnt their houses and destroyed their dwellings. Much was said, too, of the pillaging which took place on such occasions; of the breaking or looting of plates, dishes, pots and pans; the plundering of everything in chests or wardrobes, the carrying off of all movable food stuffs, and the

manner in which such provisions as could not be taken away—flour, beans, peas, and the like—were strewn on the ground. They complained bitterly that the soldiers left them nothing to eat, and that thus, so to speak, the very bread was taken from the mouths of the children. How our women and children suffered!

And what shall I say of deeds more horrible than the worst that I have related here?—deeds which, out of respect to our wives and our mothers, I cannot name, but of which I, alas! just as in the cases I have mentioned, can give the date and the place? Would that I did not need even to allude to them! But I must! I must let the curtain rise but swiftly to exhibit other scenes—but as in passing—for all may not be seen, and what is seen must only be partly seen. Our women were assaulted and ill-treated, so that after the departure of the British flying columns they were sometimes confined to their beds for days, and in many cases bore the marks of blows and bruises for weeks.

Worse still! There were many attempts at violation, and there were cases in which violation actually took place, in a manner which it is impossible to describe here.

Me Miserum! that I must record this—that it is necessary to lead posterity to the altar upon which our women were offered!

CHAPTER XXVIII

A GREAT DRIVE

THE President was obliged to leave the neighbourhood of Reitz about the 20th of February 1902, because the English were again beginning to enter the district. After having had a short time of rest, and having spent it in composing the letters mentioned in the preceding chapter, he met General de Wet at Slabbert's farm, Rondebosch. While he was still busy there with a mass of correspondence he also discussed various affairs of importance with the General, amongst which was the question of the route which the messenger who was to be sent to Europe should take. While they were thus engaged we heard that the English were approaching from the direction of Liebenberg's Vlei, and on the evening of 21st February both the President and General de Wet proceeded as far as the house of Mr. Taljaart.

Early on the following morning they were on the farm of Mr. Wessels, and intended finishing their correspondence there; and the secretaries of the President and of the General were hard at work when news was brought that the English from Liebenberg's Vlei had advanced to within a very short distance of us.

We hastily saddled our horses and trekked through Wilge River near the residence of Commandant Beukes, and halted late that afternoon not far from the farm of Mr. Christiaan de Wet—not the General. That evening General de Wet received a report

from the Commandant of Vrede, Hermanus Botha, which stated that there were large forces of the English between Botha's Pass, on the Drakensberg, and Frankfort, and that these forces were moving towards Harrismith in the form of a cordon.

It was clear now that we were in a great kraal, as it was called, and that to escape from it we should have to make an attempt to pass round the wings of the cordon, or otherwise to break through somewhere where there was an opening. In the course of the evening Commandant Ross with his Frankfort burghers also joined us, and everything was now under the direction of General de Wet. At ten o'clock that night we commenced to trek, and off-saddled at three o'clock on the following morning, Sunday, on the farm of ex-assistant Field-Cornet Jan Cronje, near Cornelis River.

Soon tidings were brought that the English were advancing in great numbers, and we had to proceed immediately. At ten o'clock we were again in the saddle. But how greatly had our numbers increased during the night. Not only were the men of Commandant Ross with us, but also a great number of persons who were not liable to commando duty, on account of old age or bodily weakness. These had left their farms, and were fleeing before the enemy. There were also children — boys from eight years upward. Everywhere there were crowds of vehicles of every sort—buggies, carts, and spiders—besides which the veld was covered with enormous numbers of cattle.

When we passed through Cornelis River, close to the house of Paul Prinsloo, the number of cattle was so great that the veld seemed literally alive with them. They were driven along in separate herds, and it was a puzzle to me how the owners managed to keep them apart. But it was the numbers that astonished me, and not only me, who knew nothing

of cattle, but the Boers themselves. General de Wet declared that he had never seen so many cattle together at one time. What a multitude! From the foremost to the hindmost there was a distance of about six miles, and it was covered with one vast mass of living creatures—men, horses, and cattle.

In order to remain out of sight, General de Wet made the great motley crowd trek up in the hollow on the left bank of Cornelis River, and in the afternoon we reached Brakfontein, where we off-saddled and outspanned. There Commandant Hermanus Botha joined the Chief-Commandant and reported that the English had advanced to the banks of Holspruit, and that they had halted in small camps, a thousand yards apart, from the Drakensberg up to Wilge River. It was also known to us that the force which had caused us to retreat through Wilge River had formed a line on the other side of the river. It was undoubtedly the largest drive which the English had up to that moment made. The question was, how to escape. We could not get round the flanks, for these were so far to the east and west that there might just as well have been no flanks at all. And there was no time for delay, for the line would grow shorter every day, and the enemy would thus be enabled to bring their camps closer to one another. Delay? General de Wet was not the man to delay, and he did not now. Now, as always, he perceived in a moment what was to be done. He must break through the cordon that very night. He decided that this should be done at Kalk-kraus, near the house of old Mr. Samuel Beukes.

The sun had just set, and the full moon began every now and then to shoot a ray of light through the rifts of a dark mass of clouds which lay on the eastern horizon, when the vast multitude once more commenced to move. What a commotion there was! Each owner toiled to keep his cattle together and

shouted to his ox-herd. The herd again yelled and whistled to turn the cattle and to urge them onward; and above all this uproar could be heard the lowing of the cows and the bleating of the calves. The Kaffirs raced to and fro, and you could see, gliding through the throng, here a cart and there a buggy, while continually you noticed horsemen feverishly pushing through in order to get to the front. It seemed, as someone remarked to me, that a pandemonium had suddenly been called into being. In half an hour the horsemen were all in front; behind them came the carts, one after the other, and then the cattle. These, now that they were being driven steadily forward, ceased to render the night horrible by their bellowing.

General de Wet ordered that the following order should be observed: a number of men were told to advance as a right wing and another as a left, while a small vanguard rode on ahead. In the centre was the General with the President. Behind them came their staffs; then followed the great motley crowd—the people who were driving the spiders and carts and buggies—and in the rear the mighty host of cattle.

We proceeded, continually halting to wait until the great rearguard could come up. The moon was not visible, as the sky was clouded, but it was light enough to see well. Onward we went. Before us we could see the vanguard, and on each side, near us at one moment and farther off the next, the flanks moved along. Everything looked weird and uncanny. At last we reached the bank of Holspruit. It was just midnight. We trekked through the spruit and approached the ridges to the east of Mr. Beukes's house. We knew that if we passed over those ridges unnoticed we would be through the kraal without mishap. But the English were lying in wait for us there. Along the whole line they had built small

forts between their camps, and they had done so here too.

The foremost men begin to climb. Suddenly we see two or three flashes above us on the ridge—a little to the right—and immediately we hear the report of rifles echoing through the valley. There on our left, too, we see sparks of fire. The whole commando suddenly comes to a standstill. The horses become restive. The burghers turn back. Great is the fury of the General when he sees this, and with forcible language he orders the men to charge. The bullets whiz past us everywhere, and several burghers are hit. My pony is slightly wounded under me. General de Wet and his officers succeed in making the burghers climb the hill to the left of the fort on our left hand, from which the English are firing on us, and we reach the top. We are hardly there when the ghastly dud-dud-dud-dud of a Maxim-Nordenfeldt is heard ; the tiny shells fly shrieking over us, and burst amongst a number of burghers not far from where we are.

Hark ! what is that?

The cry of a little boy at the sound of the Maxim-Nordenfeldt. Never in my life have I been touched deeper in my heart than by this child crying in the night. Why is he present at such a scene? Meanwhile, on another part of the ridge, Commandant Ross and the two brothers, Commandant and Assistant Commandant Botha, had engaged the enemy. They stormed and took several forts. They even gained possession of the Maxim-Nordenfeldt ; but, as might be expected, they could not remove it. Many English were killed and wounded there. We had now burst through one line of forts, and there was another through which we had to pass. We saw before us a line of small flashes from the rifles, and knew that we had to face them. The officers had the greatest trouble to get the men through the

unceasing fire. Every now and then a dash forward was made, but each time the men were baffled and returned. More than half an hour passed thus. At last a supreme effort was made, and we were through. About 600 burst through in this manner. But many remained behind. There were some who went back after they had actually gained the ridge, and others did not venture to go farther than the foot of the hill.

Of the great drove of cattle not one had even reached the foot of the hill. I make especial mention of this, because the English declared in their account of the affair that General de Wet drove great numbers of cattle against the forts and then burst through behind them. Only later in the night did some herds get through in another place with about 500 head; but the thousands of cattle, together with a considerable number of burghers on horseback and all the persons in the buggies, spiders, and carts, remained behind, and far the greater part fell into the hands of the English four days after. It is a pity that they had not had the courage to break through, for after the Commandants Ross and Botha had taken the forts the way was open. Not all, however, who drove in the carts remained behind, for the waggonette of the General and one cart in which a wounded man was conveying a comrade who was ill with fever accomplished the passage. Just as they were out of danger the sick man died on the cart!

We had a heavy loss to deplore—13 killed and about 20 wounded. Those who had broken through hurried on, and reached the farm Bavaria, at Bothaberg, just after sunrise.

Here we buried in one grave a burgher of the President's staff named Piet van der Merwe, and a boy of only thirteen years of age named Olivier. When I was walking towards the grave I encountered a little boy who had gone through the terrible night

along with us. He wore a suit made of sheepskin, and there were traces of fatigue on his drawn face, while the light which should have sparkled from his eyes was dimmed. Was this, I asked myself, the child whose cry I had heard in the night, when the shells of the Maxim-Nordenfeldt flew over us?

"What is your name?" I asked him.

He told me his name.

"How old are you?"

"Oom, I am eight, and going on for nine."

Such things happened in this war of ours, and England's boys of eight and nine—those who were not left to their fate, with cold, blue, bare feet, in the snow and ice on the streets of her great cities—did their mothers snugly tuck them in their warm beds? But the mothers of our children knew to what danger their boys were exposed, of being torn from their arms and mercilessly carried off; and rather than see this happen, they sent them away from their warm beds, to hear at midnight sounds and see sights that the ears and eyes of strong men could hardly bear.

That day the English remained where they were, but on the following they proceeded and formed the great cordon on the bank of Cornelis River.

Commandant Hermanus Botha then found an opportunity to bury our dead on the battlefield.

There had been a drive at the same time on the west of Wilge River, from Scheurklip to Britsberg, and from there in a segment east of Kroonstad to Lindley. This operation was the largest drive the English had hitherto made. A few days after he had broken through, General de Wet found an opportunity of examining the forts of the enemy. He found that they had been such a protection to them, and so formidable to us, that he wondered that more of our men had not been killed.

While he was viewing the forts burghers rode past from time to time, and informed him that during

the preceding night (25th February) 500 burghers had dashed through the cordon at Sterkfontein near the sources of Cornelis River. We also heard that General Wessels had escaped near Steil Drift without firing a shot, and somewhat later news came that General Hattingh of Kroonstad had forced a passage, with all his men and a considerable number of cattle, to the west of Lindley.

These tidings encouraged us, but what a blow it was when soon after we heard that Commandant Meyer, who had command of a portion of the Harrismith burghers, had surrendered on the 27th not far from Tandjesberg. We heard the particulars from an eye-witness, Patrick van Coller. He had escaped, and had seen the sad incident from a hill on which he had hidden himself. He said that he saw a man with a white flag ride from the commando to the English. Thereupon these rode to the burghers. The rifles were first demanded, then the saddles. The latter were burnt in seven heaps. Our men were then marched to Harrismith as prisoners-of-war.

We afterwards heard that there had been five or six burghers who would not surrender and who had raced away. They had succeeded in escaping, notwithstanding that they had been pursued by the enemy.

From time to time news reached us of remarkable escapes. I will only mention the following case.

Old Mr. Hendrik Barnard, who was between seventy and eighty years old, was one of the great number of fugitives. He had fled with a cart until he was forced to abandon it on the near approach of the English. Then he hid himself in the reeds on the banks of a spruit. There he lay for two days. Luckily he had with him a faithful Kaffir lad who cared for him as a child. If the old man looked out to see whether the English were near, the Kaffir boy

would warn him, saying, "Look out, *oh baas*! the Khakis will see you." Mr. Barnard had a little food with him, but not enough. This was replenished after dark by the Kaffir boy, who fetched from a neighbouring farm what they needed. Thus two days passed, and then, with all manner of pain in all his limbs, occasioned through the cramped position he had been forced to take, the old man could leave his hiding-place.

England spared neither women nor children nor old men tottering on the brink of the grave!

CHAPTER XXIX

TO THE TRANSVAAL

OUR horses needed rest after all the hard trekking. Luckily we were able to grant them this on the farm Rondebosch, which we reached about a week after we had effected the passage at Kalk-krans. There the horses not only got some rest but also forage. This rest, however, did not last long. After two days we heard that the English were again approaching, and, as we had expected, were returning from Harrismith. We had now to give way before the enemy once more. The question was, Whither? And as it was clear to the President that his presence in the districts of Bethlehem and Vrede was largely the cause of the continual reappearance of English columns in those parts, the question arose, whether it would not be better, in order to give these districts, which had latterly been terribly harassed, as well as himself some rest, to leave them and betake himself beyond the railway line to those portions of the Free State which were then enjoying comparative repose.

General de Wet, who was still with the President, approved of the idea, and the plan was carried out.

We saddled our horses with the intention of going to the district of Fauresmith, but it turned out that we landed in the Transvaal.

At sunset on the 5th of March we left Rondebosch. It was a dark night, and the darkness was the cause of some loss to me, for we had hardly commenced to trek when the pack in which my clothes and blankets were, tumbled off. I was riding in front, and did not

know that my little Kaffir boy was struggling with the pack; but I soon heard that everything was lost—my Kaffir boy too; for in running after a led horse that had broken loose while he was busy with the pack, he got lost himself, and although we shouted and searched for him we could not find him.

The commando had to proceed, and I had to proceed with it, possessing nothing but what was in my wallets and the clothes I was wearing. I thought it remarkable that while everything had been saved in the dash through Kalk-krans, here, where there was no immediate danger, everything should be lost. But I did not feel unhappy. On the contrary, it was with a feeling of relief that I remembered I should not have the trouble of having to look after worldly possessions, nor the care of the little Kaffir, during the difficult journey that lay before us. He was safer at his kraal, which was not far from the spot where the mishap had occurred, and the "secret of Jesus," as Matthew Arnold calls it, became clearer to me than ever before: that to gain life one must lose it. From that evening up to the end of the war I rode on my pony with a few blankets that I got the next day fastened on a led horse. I was without cares.

The English had approached to within nine miles of us on the following day, and we saw that we should have to bestir ourselves. While hurrying on our way to the Frankfort-Heilbron line of blockhouses we halted for half an hour, while General de Wet, who was about to part from the President, discussed the route that should be taken. He said that it would be best to cross the railway line somewhere between Wolvehoek and Vaal River, "and then," he said to Commandant van Niekerk, "you must"—

"But why should you not go with us?" the President asked.

General de Wet replied that if he did this it would look as if he were fleeing from the enemy.

Judge Hertzog then showed that the presence of the General was urgently required in the western district, and other members of the Executive Council remarked that if he left the north-eastern portions of the State for a while the people there would get some rest, and that, so far from taking it amiss if he went away, they would be glad if he should absent himself for some time. And now a strange thing happened. This inflexible man, who never lost his presence of mind and always knew immediately what course of action to pursue, said, "Well, then, I leave the matter in your hands. You must decide."

Of course everyone took the responsibility upon himself, and General de Wet remained with us. How secure we all felt!

In the afternoon we met with the burghers of Commandant van der Merwe, who had been driven from Parys and Vredefort over the railway line some months before, and who had remained in the Heilbron district since then. The Commandant and his men wanted to get back, and were overjoyed when General de Wet ordered them to accompany him. When it became dark we proceeded on our way in order to break through the Heilbron-Frankfort line of blockhouses to the east of the town of Heilbron.

All went well. In complete silence—no officer has need to enjoin silence when men are marching to blockhouses or the railway—we approached the line. We expected every moment to hear shots; but nothing happened. The foremost men had halted. A burgher cut the wires. Just as one of the wires was cut the reports of two shots fell on the silence of the night in quick succession. They were fired from rifles attached to the wire. We waited a moment. But all was still. No other shot rang out, and we passed through swiftly.

After riding a few hours farther over an apparently endless plain, well named Langverdriet (Long-sorrow),

we off-saddled shortly before sunrise on a farm in a hollow, with the blockhouses seven miles behind us.

The morning of the 6th of March had now dawned. After breakfasting we proceeded until twelve o'clock, and then rested till the sunset. We then mounted our horses once more, and at eleven o'clock we were a few thousand yards from the railway at a point somewhere between Wolvehoek (station) and Vaal River. General de Wet did not wish to cross just then, as he was of opinion that the guards on the line would be too wakeful, and he ordered that we should halt there till one o'clock. We thereupon tied our horses to one another and lay down on the ground. I fell asleep immediately. Shortly before one o'clock I was awakened by a sound which I had not heard for months—that of a passing train. What memories mounted in my mind, and how the hot blood surged in my veins at the thought that our railway was in the hands of the enemy! The order was given to mount, and we rode on to about four hundred yards from the line.

Halt!

A party of Commandant van der Merwe's men went on foot to cut the wires. This was done. The whole commando now rushed to the line. It must have been the tramp of our horses that woke the sentries, for when we had already reached the line a shot rang out. We passed through a ditch and then up a very slight embankment; and I saw again, as I had already seen several times before, the two rails glide under me to the rear. A feeling of relief took possession of me. The half of the commando had crossed when shots from three rifles were heard from a railway cottage in the direction of Wolvehoek, and the foremost men halted till all should have crossed. But soon we heard the rattle of a Maxim, and everyone then hurried on.

We could still occasionally hear the Maxim; but at

last it ceased, or else we were too far off to hear its vicious cackling. We off-saddled at sunrise, six miles from the line.

In the course of the day we reached the farm of Salamon Senekal, two and a half hours from the railway and one hour from the town of Parÿs, grateful to God for His protection.

There was another matter for which we had cause to be grateful: the delicious fruit of the farm. Salamon Senekal had ridden on ahead, and when the President and the General arrived there, he had spread, on a plate of corrugated iron, under the great blue gum-trees, a splendid collection of ripe figs, apples, pears, and great peaches. What a feast had been prepared for the President!

There were several other kinds of fruits in the garden besides these: quinces, prickly pears, pomegranates in such quantities that when we, about 150 men, left the farm, one could not have noticed that a commando had been there. And we had not spared the trees. Whether any had overeaten themselves I leave to the reader to determine.

At the town of Parÿs, where we arrived on the following day, we found three families, aged men and women and children. One old man had died shortly before. This would have placed the aged survivors in a difficult position if there had not been a young girl, Miss Greef, living in the family in which the death had taken place. While one of the two surviving old men made a coffin, the girl dug a grave in the garden and took upon herself the greater part of the labour of interring the body.

It is a pleasing duty to me, after having had to write so much to the discredit of the English, to be able to relate that the families here in Parÿs had no complaints to bring in against officers and men who had been quartered here for some time. On the contrary, they declared that the English had treated

them with the greatest consideration, and had also provided for all their wants.

It was the intention of General de Wet to remain at Parÿs, and on the following Sunday, March the 9th, to attend a service in the church. But this was not to be, for the English had appeared behind us. We had therefore to leave Parÿs on Saturday afternoon. In the evening we reached the village of Vredefort, and I saw in the dusk the walls of the burnt parsonage. I thought of the pleasure I had enjoyed when, seventeen months before, I stayed there for a night. If anybody had said then that the war would last another seventeen months, who would have believed him?

We found the blockhouses from Kopjes Siding to Potchefstroom and those from Kroonstad to Potchefstroom broken up. We rode forward without adventure to a place nine miles from Valsch River, and arrived at the farm of Broekman's on Thursday, 13th March. We had trekked from the district of Heilbron to where we now were in eight days, and during all that time we had been in a completely devastated region. We had met no one on the farms. Every house that we had passed was burnt or destroyed. We had not seen a single horse, ox, or sheep. The veld was in splendid condition—the grass waved in the breeze, but we had seen no cattle to graze on it. We had ridden through a wilderness, excepting that the ruins on the farms showed that the country had once been inhabited. At Broekman's[1] General de Wet

[1] We found a report here, fixed on a board, of an address delivered by Lord Kitchener at Belfast on the 18th and 19th of December 1901, with this heading: *Burghers, read this!* The contents were for the most part the same as those of the extract of the letter already given. Lord Kitchener declared that the behaviour of the Boers in the veld seemed very foolish to him. It was not war that was now being carried on, for the operations rather resembled police operations, seeing that the troops had to capture the burghers. He said that the English captured between four and five hundred burghers every week. The Boers in the veld seemed to him like sheep without a shepherd. He

learned that there were blockhouses on the left bank of the Valsch River, and at the same time word was brought by the scouts that all the fords of the Vaal were occupied by the English. He thereupon decided to cross through Valsch River and the blockhouse line to the opposite side.

In the evening he crossed the river, while Commandant van der Merwe and Commandant van Niekerk of Kroonstad remained behind to operate in their own districts. We found the river almost too full to cross, but nothing particular happened; and at the blockhouse line all went well, notwithstanding a heavy fire which was opened on us. Only a few horses were left behind. On the following morning we heard that General de la Rey had come in contact with the enemy, and that he had captured a great many waggons and mules.

I must now state how it happened that we went to

feared that the present leaders were animated by other motives than the welfare of their country at heart, and that, unless the Boers acted for themselves, they would be led to complete ruin. The destruction of property which still continued was to be deplored, but it was the fault of the present leaders, who misled the people by assuring them that they would receive help from abroad. The burghers should judge for themselves, Lord Kitchener advised. They ought to convene meetings and vote, not by a show of hands, but by ballot, so that they might not be accused of so-called high treason—whether they would continue the war or not. If the majority were in favour of continuing the war, let them do so; but he warned them that in that case the responsibility would rest on the burghers themselves. If, however, the majority were in favour of peace, the burghers should choose other leaders in the place of those who had held them in the veld by means of lies and threats. Lord Kitchener believed that if the Boers in the field chose a committee, and sent this committee to him, he would receive them; and he felt convinced that, before they left, they would have agreed on a peace acceptable to both parties. Voluntary surrenders would be accepted, if the men came in in parties, and their cattle and property would be guaranteed. They would, however, do better work by remaining on the veld and using their influence with the leaders to bring this about. Officers surrendering with their men would not be banished. Lord Kitchener further indulged in the spiteful remark that President Steyn and General de Wet (he called them "Steyn" and "de Wet") profited financially by the continuance of the war.

the Transvaal instead of to the western portions of the Free State as we had intended.

The question had often been considered of late whether we would go to the western portion of our State or through the Vaal River. This was decided at Rietyat by the consideration of various circumstances. President Steyn had been suffering since 20th February from an affection of the eyes which seemed to be getting more and more serious. Would it not be best to go through the Vaal River in order to consult Dr. von Rennenkamff, who had joined the commandos of General de la Rey? If this were done, the opportunity would be offered also of consulting General de la Rey before sending the messenger to Europe. This decided the matter, and we resolved at once to cross into the Transvaal. This, however, could not be done by means of the fords, for they were, as I have said before, guarded by the English. We had therefore to avail ourselves of a fearfully bad bridle-path, which led through the Vaal River a mile and a half above the British guard at Commando Drift.

On Monday, March the 17th, we reached Bosmansrust, and from there the President, General de Wet, and the other members of the Executive Council proceeded to Zendelingsfontein, where they were received with great marks of honour.

The burghers of General de la Rey were delighted to have the Free State leaders in their midst, and presented President Steyn with three addresses.

There I heard the particulars concerning General de la Rey's operations. There had been two battles. The first, at Yzerspruit, had taken place on 25th February, when 2 Armstrong cannon, 1 Maxim-Nordenfeldt, 153 loaded waggons with their teams, 23 Scotch carts, 4 carts, 5 water carts, 460 oxen, 200 horses, and 1500 mules had been taken. There had been 241 prisoners-of-war, of whom 10 were officers. About 200 English had been killed and

wounded, and our loss 12 killed and 26 wounded. The second battle had been fought on the 7th of March. Lieutenant-General Lord Methuen had hastened to regain possession of the guns. His force, numbering 1500 men, had been attacked at Klip Drift, Harts River, and had fallen into the hands of General de la Rey. There had been captured 4 Armstrong guns, 75 waggons with their teams, 38 carts, and 518 horses. Besides this there had been 400 killed and wounded and 859 prisoners-of-war. Amongst these was Lord Methuen who was wounded in the leg. He and General de la Rey had been opposed to one another since Magersfontein, and had fought with varying fortune. Here de la Rey triumphed. Our loss had been 9 killed and 25 wounded. The prisoners were released after each of the battles.

General de la Rey, after showing Lord Methuen every attention, allowed him to be taken to Klerksdorp. This act of General de la Rey displeased the burghers. They considered that as the enemy treated our captured Generals in a different manner—the name of General Scheepers in the Cape Colony was mentioned in this connection — the least that General de la Rey should have done was to keep Lord Methuen prisoner.

General de la Rey thereupon laid the matter before the Council of War, and pointed out that, although it would have been his duty to keep an officer who had nothing the matter with him, humanity demanded that every possible help should be given to a wounded man. The other officers agreed, and Lord Methuen, who had been stopped on his way to Klerksdorp when the burghers had demurred, was set at liberty.

To my great joy I met the Rev. J. Strasheim here, and went with him to visit and address the commandos of General Kemp, Commandants de Beer and Potgieter, and General Liebenberg. I was with the commandos of General Liebenberg on Sunday night, 23rd March, when, at eleven o'clock,

the loud tramp of horses was heard on the road coming from Klerksdorp.

We immediately saddled our horses and inspanned. It appeared on the following morning that the English had come from Klerksdorp in four divisions, and had been joined by other forces that had advanced from Commando Drift (Vaal River) at the one end and from Vaalbank on the other. When morning dawned, the English had accomplished the remarkable feat of forming an arc in one night from Makwassie to Vaalbank, a distance of seventy-two miles, and General Liebenberg saw that he was in a tremendous kraal, as we called it.

He was driven from Doornpoort to Leeuwfontein, and from there to Limoenfontein. He endeavoured continually to break through towards Vaalbank and in the direction of Schoonspruit, but fresh English troops continually confronted his weary burghers. Near Limoenfontein the English fired on us with shrapnel, and we hurried on to Buysfontein. Two guns and one Maxim-Nordenfeldt had to be abandoned. At Buysfontein General Liebenberg was forced to abandon his laager also, and the commandos escaped by racing helter-skelter over the great stones down the valley of Buysfontein, while the enemy harassed them with cannon and rifle fire. In the evening, after having had our horses under saddle for twenty hours, we rested until half-past eleven. We were apprehensive of the enemy from the Makwassie end of the line; but the forces there had advanced on both sides of us, and General Liebenberg succeeded in passing in the night between two camps without knowing it at the time, and unnoticed also by the English.

On the following day we reached Zendelingsfontein. Thus I had been in a kraal (drive) once more.

On Wednesday, 26th March, we came to Doornkuil, and learnt that other commandos had had very narrow escapes, and that unfortunately General de la Rey's staff had been captured. I was glad, however, to learn that President Steyn and his staff were safe.

PART III.—RESIGNATION

PART III

RESIGNATION

CHAPTER I

"WILL THIS LEAD TO PEACE?"

"WILL this lead to peace?" the burghers asked one another, when, on 27th March, the news spread through the commandos that there were messengers from Acting President Schalk Burger seeking President Steyn. The messengers, it was said, had a safe-conduct from Lord Kitchener, and were provided with horses and rations by the English in order to be able to travel rapidly.

I got all the particulars when I returned to the laager of the President on the following morning (Good Friday). Our Government had received an invitation from the Government of the South African Republic to meet them in order to discuss the question of whether a proposal of peace could not be made to England.

This invitation of the Transvaal Government was the result of Lord Kitchener's having sent, on behalf of his Government, to President Burger on the 4th of March a copy of the correspondence of 25th to 29th January between Holland and England.

Baron Gerické had asked the British Government whether the Netherlands Government could not act as intermediary between England and the Boers in

the field. The Netherlands Government considered themselves justified in making this request, as exceptional circumstances prevented the Boers in the field from treating directly with the British Government through their representatives in Europe. They therefore declared themselves willing, if England consented, to act as a third party, and to ask the Boer Deputation if they were willing to go to South Africa with a safe-conduct from England to discuss matters with the Boers, and then return to Europe with full powers to make a treaty of peace, which would be binding in Europe as well as in Africa.

Lord Lansdowne had replied that, although the British Government appreciated the philanthropic motives of Holland, they adhered to their decision not to accept foreign intervention. It was open, however, to the Boer Deputation to lay a request for a safe-conduct before the British Government, but that the Government could not decide on the matter before knowing what the nature of such request was and the grounds on which it was made. Lord Lansdowne had said that it was not clear to the British Government whether the Deputation had still any influence with the Boer representatives in South Africa; and that the British Government was of opinion that all powers of government, including that of negotiation, were vested in President Steyn for the Boers in the Orange Free State, and Acting President Burger for those in the South African Republic. He considered that the most speedy and satisfactory manner in which a settlement could be arrived at would be by direct negotiation between the Boer leaders in South Africa and the Commander-in-Chief of the British forces, who had already been instructed to forward immediately any offers he might receive to the British Government. It had been said finally that the British Government had decided that if the Boers in South Africa wished to negotiate, negotia-

tions had to be conducted in South Africa and not in Europe; for at least three months would elapse if the Deputation went to South Africa, and thereby hostilities would be protracted, and much further suffering would be caused.

On receipt of the copy of this correspondence, Acting President Burger had asked Lord Kitchener for a safe-conduct for himself and the members of his Government in order to meet President Steyn and the Executive Council of the Orange Free State, and to discuss a proposal of peace with them. Lord Kitchener had immediately granted him the safe-conduct, and the Transvaal Government had proceeded by rail to Kroonstad, as they considered that town, according to information received from Lord Kitchener as to where President Steyn was presumed to be, the spot from which they could most easily come into touch with the Free State Government.

Messages were sent from Kroonstad to search for President Steyn. They found him at Roodewal, district Lichtenburg, and handed him the letter of Acting President Burger.

The letter contained a request for a meeting, for the purpose above mentioned. President Steyn replied that he considered Klerksdorp, Potchefstroom, or a spot in the neighbourhood of these towns, as the best adapted for holding the conference.

While waiting for an answer to this letter, a fight took place between the commandos of General de la Rey and the English at Brakspruit, not far from Roodewal. Here the English experienced once more what it meant to be bombarded. No advantage was gained on either side, but the English forces were arrested in their progress and retired to Van Tonder's farm.

A letter from Lord Kitchener reached President Steyn at Weltevrede on April the 5th, containing Acting President Burger's answer, and a safe-conduct

from the English Commander-in-Chief for the Government of the Orange Free State to Klerksdorp and back.

On the 7th our Executive Council started, accompanied by General de la Rey, who had been summoned by his Government, as one of the members, to take part in the negotiations, and we arrived at Klerksdorp at twelve o'clock on the 9th.

President Steyn was received by Major E. H. M. Leggett, and quartered in the Old Town. We heard that the Transvaal Government were already in Klerksdorp, and that they had quarters in the New Town. The two Governments were thus separated, excepting during the time they conferred together. This was the case afterwards, at Pretoria also.

We had hardly entered the house when the sounds of a bagpipe fell on our ears, and soon a detachment of about twenty Highlanders, under the command of Lieutenant Burn, marched up to the house.

"This is a guard-of-honour for the President," said Major Leggett, who had been charged to look after the Free State Government. "It was," he said, "most annoying to be snapshotted and stared at by a gaping crowd."

The President appreciated, of course, the honour, but it was clear to us that the "guard-of-honour" was to keep an eye not only on intruders from outside, but also upon us, so that no one from within should find his way out. Indeed, it soon appeared that we were not allowed to go farther than the boundaries of the plot of ground on which the house stood, and if one wished to go anywhere farther one was always accompanied by one of the military. But we did not take this amiss. It was war, and we were inside the English lines.

No one could complain of the treatment of the English. The President was made as comfortable

as possible, and all respect due to his position was shown him.

We were allowed to buy clothes, and when we met the Transvaalers that afternoon we heard that some of them had written letters to their wives, and had received answers. President Steyn, in view of his serious indisposition, also availed himself of the opportunity afforded him, and wrote to Mrs. Steyn from Pretoria, acquainting her with the state of his health.

At three o'clock on the afternoon of our arrival the two Governments assembled in a large tent erected between the Old and New Towns.

There were present — from the South-African Republic: The Acting President, S. W. Burger, Commandant-General Louis Botha, State-Secretary F. W. Reitz, General de la Rey, and Ex-Generals L. G. Meyer and G. C. Krogh, also the State-Attorney, Mr. L. Jacobsz.

From the Orange Free State: The State President, M. T. Steyn, General de Wet, Acting State-Secretary W. J. C. Brebner, Judge J. B. M. Hertzog, and General C. H. Olivier.

For the Transvaal Mr. D. van Velden acted as secretary of the Executive Council, and the Rev. J. D. Kestell[1] as acting-secretary for the Free State Executive Council.

There were also present the advocates J. Ferreira (State-Attorney for the western district of the South African Republic) and N. de Wet (secretary of Commandant-General L. Botha). Mr. B. J. du Plessis was also present as private secretary to President Steyn. The Acting President of the Transvaal delivered a short address of welcome to the President and Executive Council of the Orange Free State, and asked the Rev. J. D. Kestell to open the proceedings with prayer. He thereupon ex-

[1] I accepted the post of acting-secretary not for the position, but in order to get material for my book.

plained the circumstances which had led up to the meeting of the two Governments.

He said that he and his Government considered the forwarding by the British Government of a copy of the correspondence between it and the Government of Holland as an invitation made by England to the two Republics to discuss the question of peace. Viewing the action of England in this light, he had requested a safe-conduct from Lord Kitchener to be enabled to meet the President and Executive of the Orange Free State, in order to have a conference with them, and, if possible, to co-operate with them in drawing up a peace proposal to be laid before the British Government. Before, however, they proceeded to discuss the question, it was necessary, he thought, to hear particulars of the conditions under which the war was being carried on, and he thought that the general officers present should address the meeting.

As it was decided not to hold minutes, I shall merely state that Commandant-General Louis Botha, Chief-Commandant de Wet, and Assistant Commandant General de la Rey addressed the meeting, giving an account of the state of the country and of the numbers and condition of the commandos. Several other members of the Government spoke.

The next day the following resolution was agreed to:—

"The Governments of the South African Republic and Orange Free State, having met in consequence of Lord Kitchener's having sent the correspondence exchanged between the Government of His Majesty the King of England and Her Majesty the Queen of Holland, concerning the desirability of giving the Governments of these Republics the opportunity of communicating with their authorised envoys in Europe, in whom both Governments have all along had the greatest confidence;

"Having marked the conciliatory spirit which appears therein on the part of His Britannic Majesty, as well as the desire expressed therein by Lord Lansdowne in the name of his Government, to put an end to this struggle;

"Are of opinion that it is now a suitable moment to show their willingness to do all in their power to put an end to the war.

"And therefore decide to lay certain propositions before Lord Kitchener, as the representative of His Britannic Majesty's Government, which may serve as a basis for further negotiations to bring about the wished-for peace.

"Furthermore, it is the opinion of both Governments, in order to hasten the attainment of the desired end, and to avoid as much misconception as possible, that his Excellency Lord Kitchener be requested to meet these Governments in person at a time and place fixed by him, in order that the Governments may lay peace-proposals directly before him, which they are prepared to do, and thus to solve all difficulties which may exist by direct verbal communication with him, and thus make sure that this conference will bear the wished-for fruits."

A letter signed by the two Presidents enclosing this proposition was written during the meeting, and despatched to Lord Kitchener. The meeting then adjourned till the afternoon, when much was said about the proposals to be made to Lord Kitchener.

Finally, at the instance of General de la Rey, seconded by Mr. L. Jacobsz, the drafting of a proposal was relegated to a commission.

This commission handed in the following report, which was accepted by the meeting:—

"The commission, having taken into consideration the desire of this meeting to draw up a proposal (in connection with the letter sent yesterday by both Presidents to his Excellency Lord Kitchener), with a

view to a conference with Lord Kitchener, suggests the following points:—

"1. The making of an enduring treaty of friendship and peace, by which is understood—

(*a*) Arrangement of Customs Union.

(*b*) Postal, Telegraphic, and Railway Union.

(*c*) Fixing of the Franchise.

"2. Dismantling of all forts belonging to the State.

"3. Arbitration in future disagreements between the contracting parties, the arbitrators to be chosen by both parties, in equal numbers from their subjects. With a final arbitrator to be chosen by the appointed arbitrators.

"4. Equal rights in regard to education in both the English and Dutch languages.

"5. Mutual amnesty."

Messrs. Krogh, L. Jacobsz, Judge Hertzog, and Commandant-General Louis Botha then addressed the meeting.

Shortly after General Botha had concluded his speech, General Wilson came to the tent and brought a message from Lord Kitchener saying that he was willing to meet the Governments at Pretoria. General Wilson also stated that arrangements would be immediately made for the railway journey, and that the Presidents and their Executives could start for Pretoria in the evening.

CHAPTER II

A CONFERENCE WITH LORD KITCHENER AND LORD MILNER

AT six o'clock in the morning on the 12th of April the Governments arrived at Pretoria in two separate trains.

The Transvaal Government were quartered in the house of Mr. C. Rooth, adjoining that in which Lord Kitchener lived, while the members of the Free State Government were taken to the residence of Mr. Philippe in Arcadia.

Nothing could surpass the friendliness of the English. Their hospitality left nothing to be desired, and the considerateness of those who had the difficult task to perform was admirable.

Yet with all these signs of politeness, one could not help thinking of what that same nation had done to our wives and children. The English spread for our Governments a table with a menu as good as their commissariat could supply, and at the same moment there were pining away on desolated farms the women and children whose houses they had burnt over their heads.

One thing that impressed me very strongly was the strong desire which the English could not conceal that Peace should be restored. They made no secret of it. This will become more plain in this chapter, when the telegrams exchanged between our Governments and that of the British come to be read.

But what sort of Peace?

It soon became clear from conversations that we had with Major Leggett and other officers, that it was a Peace based upon British conditions. The English officers gave us to understand that it was taken for granted by them that we were now going to negotiate with a Conqueror. The annexation of the two Republics was regarded as an established, irrevocable fact. They constantly spoke of the Orange River Colony. Then they lost no time in informing us shortly after our arrival that Civil Government had been partly restored in the Transvaal, and that since the beginning of the month the High Court at Pretoria had been reopened. They also asked what our leading men would consider the best way in which the farms in the two States could be rebuilt and restocked.

President Steyn and General de Wet answered very curtly, and it became plain to the English officers that it was better not to hold such conversations with the leaders of our people.

With the exception of this, all went smoothly, and were it not that one could always under the garb of politeness perceive an enemy, who had destroyed our country, then certainly we might have looked back upon our stay at Klerksdorp and Pretoria with the pleasantest recollections.

We had not long been in the house in which we were to stay before a message came from Lord Kitchener, that he desired to meet the Governments. A hasty breakfast was eaten, and then the President and General de Wet entered Lord Kitchener's carriage, and the other members of the Executive the carts provided for that purpose, and were conveyed to the house of the Commander-in-Chief. Conducted into a large hall, we found the Transvaalers there already. Lord Kitchener stood on the other side of the hall, and came forward to meet President Steyn. He shook hands with him, as also with the other members of the Government.

Then he stood erect in the attitude of a soldier, and a little general conversation followed. After some moments Lord Kitchener said that the work which had brought the Governments to Pretoria should be commenced, and expressed it as his opinion that, as the negotiations were at first to be conducted in an informal manner, the secretaries should retire. Thereupon these gentlemen left the hall, the doors were closed, everybody sat down at the table, and Lord Kitchener asked who was to begin.

President Steyn answered that Lord Kitchener should. Thereupon Lord Kitchener began. He spoke in the tone of a person who had a grievance. He wished, he said, to say something concerning what he had been reported as having said in June 1901, when he had negotiated with General Louis Botha. In connection with those negotiations, he declared that he had been misrepresented, wrong motives having been imputed to him. It had been said, for instance, that he had contemplated the destruction of the Boers. He could, however, give the assurance that no such thing had ever been his intention. Those who said so greatly misrepresented him. Whether what he said was aimed at General Botha, nobody can say—he mentioned no names. He spoke, however, in the tone of a person who considered that he had been unfairly treated. "But," he suddenly said, "that is past. I only say this because no official minutes are being kept, everything must take place informally and in a friendly manner. . . . I understand that you have something to propose. This can be done now."

Acting President S. W. Burger then introduced the question. He said that both the Governments had drawn up a proposal at Klerksdorp, and he then proceeded to read the proposal article by article. State-Secretary F. W. Reitz acted as interpreter between the two parties.

as a parallel, seeing that it had never had self-government.

To this President Steyn replied that the Irish had self-government, and that in a measure that had never yet been granted to any Colony, seeing that they were represented in the Imperial Parliament. Their power also in this respect was so great that the Irish vote, under a strong man like Parnell, could turn the scale in a Parliamentary question in one way or another.

Lord Kitchener then said that he was himself an Irishman, and therefore better able to judge in regard to Irish affairs. He proceeded to say that what was contemplated by the British Government was self-government for the Boers, preceded by military rule for a certain period. That this military rule as a preliminary measure was indispensable at the commencement of Peace for the establishment and maintenance of law and order; that as soon as this period had elapsed self-government would be substituted for it, and then the Boers could annul any measure or law made by the military authorities. He remarked, however, that he felt sure that much that was good would be called into being by the military government, which they would not desire afterwards to rescind. But the People would have it in their power to decide in every case.

A desultory discussion followed now, and Lord Kitchener urged that the Governments should make a proposal in accordance with what he had suggested; and both the Presidents replied that the Governments, according to the constitutions of the Republics, were not qualified to make any proposal whereby the Independence of the Republics should be touched.

When Lord Kitchener saw that he could make no progress he moved about impatiently in his chair, and said,—again with the same gesture as before: that if the Governments wished he would telegraph their

proposal to his Government, but he could guess—he did not know officially what they would do in England, what he said was merely his own opinion, —but he could guess what the answer would be.

The Presidents then expressed their desire that Lord Kitchener should send the proposal that had been made by them; but he thought that it was not desirable to transmit it in the form in which it had been laid before him. He thought it could be drafted in a more acceptable form. Thereupon he took a pencil and roughly drafted the preamble of a telegram. He read it aloud, and asked whether anybody wished to make any remark upon it, in order to make the telegram still more acceptable; and whether they wished to appoint anyone for this purpose. Mr. Reitz was nominated, and the preamble of Lord Kitchener with the points of the proposal (modified, as will be observed) was thus drawn up, approved of by all, and, on the adjournment of the meeting, forwarded to the British Government.

FROM LORD KITCHENER TO SECRETARY OF STATE.

"PRETORIA, 12*th April* 1902.

" . . . The Boer Representatives wish to lay before His Majesty's Government that they have an earnest desire for peace, and that they have consequently decided to ask the British Government to end hostilities and to enter into an agreement of peace with them. They are prepared to enter into an agreement by which, in their opinion, all future wars between them and the British Government in South Africa will be prevented. They consider this object may be attained by providing for the following points:—

"1. Franchise.

"2. Equal rights for Dutch and English languages in educational matters.

"3. Customs Union.
"4. Dismantling of all forts in Transvaal and Free State.
"5. Post, Telegraph, and Railway Union.
"6. Arbitration in case of future differences, and only subjects of the parties to be the arbitrators.
"7. Mutual amnesty.
" . . . But if these terms are not satisfactory, they desire to know what terms the British Government would give them in order to secure the end they all desire."

After this conversation with Lord Kitchener the two Governments consulted with each other, and agreed that when they again met the representative of the British Government they would very clearly declare their standpoint, namely, that in the matter of Independence it was the People alone that could constitutionally decide.

Sunday was passed quietly, and divine service was held in the house in which the Free State Government was quartered.

Early on Monday morning, the 14th of April, Lord Kitchener sent to the members of both Governments a copy of the following telegram. He also stated that Lord Milner would take part with him in the conference.

The telegram was as follows :—

FROM SECRETARY OF STATE TO LORD KITCHENER.

"LONDON, 13*th April* 1902.

" . . . His Majesty's Government sincerely share the earnest desire of the Boer Representatives, and hope that the present negotiations may lead to that result. But they have already stated in the clearest terms, and must repeat, that they cannot entertain

any proposals which are based on the continued Independence of the former Republics which have been formally annexed to the British Crown. It would be well for you and Milner to interview Boer Representatives and explain this. You should encourage them to put forward fresh proposals, excluding Independence, which we shall be glad to receive."

At ten o'clock the members of the Government again assembled in Lord Kitchener's house.

Lord Milner entered the hall after the members of the Government had assembled, and was introduced to the Representatives of the People by Lord Kitchener. He greeted the Presidents as "Mr. Steyn and Mr. Burger." But later, during the conference, he addressed each—was it inadvertently—as President.

It struck me that he had piercing eyes, that apparently strove to penetrate the person on whom they were fixed. Those who had seen him before, said that he had become very thin. He had grown grey, and wrinkles were beginning to show on his forehead. He also looked pale, and he seemed to show signs of fatigue. Before the conference was continued, Lord Milner spoke a few words. He also wished to remove wrong impressions. He declared that it had been said that he was not well disposed towards the Boers. That was incorrect. He could give the assurance that he wished to promote the interests of the Boers; and that he, like themselves, desired peace.

Thereupon Lord Kitchener laid the telegram from the British Government on the table. Without entering into discussion on it, the Presidents pointed out that it was impossible for the two Governments to act in accordance with the desire of the British Government, seeing that, as had already been said on Saturday, they were not qualified to discuss the

question of Independence before having consulted the People.

Lord Milner. May I ask if the prisoners-of-war will also be consulted?

President Steyn. Your Excellency surely cannot be in earnest in putting this question?

Lord Milner (in a tone of annoyance). Yes, certainly.

President Steyn. How can the prisoners-of-war be consulted?—they are civilly dead. To mention one practical difficulty: suppose the prisoners should decide that the war should be continued, and the burghers on commando that it should not — what then?—

Lord Kitchener and Lord Milner, seeing the absurdity, laughed aloud. They quite agreed with President Steyn, and admitted that the difficulty raised by him was to the point.

Lord Kitchener, however, wished to call attention to the word "excluding" in the answer of the British Government. He put it that the words "excluding Independence" rendered a discussion, as to Dependence or Independence, superfluous. The question should now be discussed as if Independence were finally excluded; and assuming this, such proposals should be made as it was thought would be acceptable as well for the Boers as for the British Government.

President Steyn then pointed out again that it was beyond the power of the Government to do so. They had no right to make a proposal that even assumed the exclusion of Independence.

Lord Kitchener and Lord Milner here again agreed with the President. Both said at the same time, "We agree—we agree."

Meanwhile it had been urged several times that Lord Kitchener should request his Government to make such proposals as might be regarded as some kind of compensation, and which could, as such, be

laid before the People, in case the question of surrendering their Independence were laid before them.

Now this may look as if the Governments were already convinced that our cause was a hopeless one, and that they, being themselves not qualified to surrender the Independence, were only waiting for the decision of the People thereupon. But I know well that the majority at least of the men there did not think so, and that they felt convinced that, if they appealed to the People, the People would with one accord say, "We will retain our Independence, and if England does not agree to this, then we shall go on with the war."

The Representatives of the English Government would not, however, be persuaded that the British Government should make any proposals, and after much discussion Lord Milner said that it appeared to him that they had come to a "Dead-lock."

"It seems so to me too," said Lord Kitchener, "and that is just what I wish to avoid.—Would the gentlemen not," he continued, "first consult about this privately? If so, Lord Milner and I can retire from the room for a while, and the result of your deliberations can, when you are ready, be communicated to us"—

But it was agreed to adjourn till three o'clock in the afternoon.

It is not necessary to relate here the particulars of the private conference which was held. I will only record the resolution that was taken: "The Governments, considering that the People have hitherto fought and sacrificed everything for their Independence, and as they constitutionally have not the power to make any proposal touching Independence, and as the British Government now ask for other proposals from them, which they cannot make without having previously consulted the People, they propose that an armistice be agreed upon to enable them to

do so. At the same time they request that a member of the Deputation should come over to them."

At three o'clock they again met the Representatives of the British Government. President Steyn then began by saying (in the spirit of the resolution that had been taken), that the Governments, having taken the reply of the British Government into consideration, had concluded that they could make no proposal on the basis therein suggested; but as they were desirous of seeing Peace restored, they requested (1) that one of our delegates [in Europe] should obtain a safe-conduct to come hither, and that, if it were deemed inadvisable to allow him to return, he might remain somewhere in South Africa, on parole, till the war was over; (2) that an armistice should be agreed upon in order to enable the Governments to consult the People regarding the question of Independence.

Lord Kitchener said, "This comes as a surprise on us!"

The question as to allowing a member of the Deputation to come over was now left unanswered. It had already been discussed in the forenoon, and then Lord Kitchener had said, that it concerned a military question regarding which he had himself to decide, and that he could not grant the request, because it would be an exceptional mode of proceeding to which he could not consent.

As to an armistice, he now also at first said nothing; but after waiting some moments he said, as if the thought had just occurred to him, that it seemed better for him to ask his Government to make proposals which could be regarded as compensation to the Boers for the surrender of their Independence. But this was exactly what the Governments had repeatedly desired of him, and which he, without positively refusing, had ignored. Up to the moment that he made the proposal which

he now made, he and Lord Milner had been trying to compromise the Governments, by binding them in one way or other to the surrender of Independence. He now, however, no doubt perceived that there was a risk of the negotiations breaking off, and proposed —as if it had come to him as an inspiration—what the Governments had constantly, but without result, desired of him. What he suggested was of course immediately accepted, and the following telegram, drafted in accordance therewith, was sent by him to his Government:—

FROM LORD KITCHENER TO SECRETARY OF STATE.

"PRETORIA, *14th April* 1902.

"A difficulty has arisen in getting on with proceedings. The Representatives state that constitutionally they have no power to discuss terms based on the surrender of Independence, inasmuch as only the burghers can agree to such a basis, therefore, if they were to propose terms, it would put them in a false position with regard to their People. If, however, His Majesty's Government could state the terms that, subsequent to a relinquishment of Independence, they would be prepared to grant, the Representatives, after asking for the necessary explanations, without any expression of approval or disapproval, would submit such conditions to their People."

The Governments waited for a reply the whole of Tuesday. On Wednesday the officers—who had been absent from their commandos so long—became impatient, and General de Wet was just about to proceed to Lord Kitchener to inquire if matters could not be expedited, when a letter was received from him saying that an answer from the English Government had been received, acknowledging the receipt of the telegram that had been sent on

Monday, and adding that an answer to it would be sent during the course of the day.

But it did not arrive during the day, and the dissatisfaction of the Generals increased. The impatience grew greater, especially when the English gave accounts of a fight that had taken place with the commando of General de la Rey after he had left it, and said that Commandant Potgieter and 43 burghers had fallen. At last, on the following morning, Thursday, the 17th of April, Lord Kitchener invited the members of the Governments once more, and laid before them the following telegram :—

FROM SECRETARY OF STATE TO LORD KITCHENER.

"LONDON, 16*th April* 1902.

"We have received with considerable surprise the message from the Boer leaders contained in your telegram. The meeting has been arranged at their request, and they must have been aware of our repeated declarations that we could not entertain any proposals based on the renewed Independence of the two South African States. We were therefore entitled to assume that the Boer Representatives had relinquished the idea of Independence and would propose terms of surrender for the forces still in the field. They now state they are constitutionally incompetent to discuss terms which do not include a restoration of Independence, but ask us to inform them what conditions would be granted if, after submitting the matter to their followers, they were to relinquish the demand for Independence.

"This does not seem to us a satisfactory method of proceeding, or one best adapted to secure at the earliest moment a cessation of the hostilities which have involved the loss of so much life and treasure. We are, however, as we have been from the first, anxious to spare the effusion of further blood and

to hasten the restoration of peace and prosperity to the countries afflicted by the war, and you and Lord Milner are authorised to refer the Boer leaders to the offer made by you to General Botha more than twelve months ago, and to inform them that although subsequent great reduction in the strength of the forces opposed to us and the additional sacrifices thrown upon us by the refusal of that offer would justify us in proposing far more onerous terms, we are still prepared, in the hope of a permanent peace and reconciliation, to accept a general surrender on the lines of that offer, but with such modifications in details as may be mutually agreed upon."

The conference was not long. Our Governments left the hall to consult with one another. They resolved again to ask Lord Kitchener that a member of our Deputation should be allowed to come over to us, and that an armistice should be agreed to, to enable us to consult the People.

On returning and again making this request, Lord Kitchener without hesitation replied that the Deputation would not be allowed to come. He asked what the good of it would be, as nothing was really happening in Europe that could help the Boers. This, he said, the Governments could see for themselves in the newspapers. He could also give them the assurance of it on his word of honour. He also gave his decision with regard to an armistice. He could not grant it; but he declared that he was willing to do what he could. He was prepared to give the Governments every possible opportunity to enable them to get the votes of the People. He would give the Generals the use for that purpose of the railway and telegraph. They could go to the People, and call them together to meetings where they could ascertain what the burghers thought on the matter in question.

The task of the Governments was for the present completed. All left the hall excepting Generals Botha, De Wet, and De la Rey. These remained to discuss with Lord Kitchener the method of getting about their work. The Generals proposed to Lord Kitchener, and it was accepted by him, that thirty burghers for each Republic—sixty in all—should be chosen by the People at their meetings to express the will of the People. It was also decided that after the sixty representatives had become acquainted with the views of the People, they should acquaint the Governments with the same on the 15th of May 1902, at Vereeniging, in order that they could lay the same before the British Government.

Lord Kitchener also granted an armistice of one day, at the centres where the different meetings were to be held; and further, to those commandos whose chief officers were chosen to represent the People at Vereeniging, as long as these officers should be absent, in order to attend the conference. It was also promised that the Governments would not be interfered with where they waited until the assembly began on the 15th of May at Vereeniging.

In the meanwhile the secretaries had been very busy writing out a document which would explain the whole condition of affairs. This document, to which the correspondence exchanged between Lord Kitchener on behalf of the two Governments and the British Government was appended, was to be given to the officers, to be read by them to the People at their meetings, so as to enable them more easily to decide the question.

On Friday evening, the 18th of April, the Governments left Pretoria. The three Generals and some of the members of the Executive Council went in different directions to do their important work. The other members, to whom no special work had been intrusted, sought a place somewhere, where they

could rest quietly and await the result of the voting. What would that be? That question everyone asked with more or less uneasiness, and all thought with anxiety of the future. But not alone did the great importance of our cause weigh heavily upon us. There was something else that disquieted us. President Steyn was very ill. The condition of his eyes, of which I have already spoken, and which had been part of the reason why he had come to the Transvaal, appeared to be of a more serious nature than we had suspected. Dr. W. van der Merwe, of Krugersdorp, had declared that it was a dangerous affection of the nerves, and everyone could see now that it was so. The President gradually became weaker and weaker, and when he took part in the negotiations, it had already become difficult for him to ascend the door-steps. After the negotiations Dr. van der Merwe advised him strongly not to return to the veld whilst we were waiting for the result of the meetings of the People, and said that his house at Krugersdorp was at his service. But the President, ill as he was, grateful though he was to the kind doctor, said that he could not think of it, because, if he remained at Krugersdorp, this would have a bad influence upon the People; and he resolved to go out again. So he went from Pretoria to Klerksdorp, and from there to Leeuwfontein, six miles from Wolmeranstad. There he remained for a week, and then took up his abode in a half-destroyed house in Wolmeranstad, which he did not leave until we went to Vereeniging.

The long time of rest stood me in good stead. I made use of it to write my notes in connection with the negotiation.

CHAPTER III

THE MEETING OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE PEOPLE AT VEREENIGING

ON Friday evening, the 18th of April 1902, the Generals had, as we saw in the foregoing chapter, left Pretoria for the purpose of going through the two Republics and ascertaining what the wish of the People was in regard to the great matter on which the Governments themselves had no power to decide. All went prosperously. The officers who held the meetings were everywhere helped by the English. Rail and telegraph were at their service, and when the 15th of May approached, all the meetings had been held and all the representatives elected.

On the 13th of May all the general officers had been elected, and had left as Representatives of the People for Vereeniging. There was, accordingly, an armistice from that day everywhere in the two States for the burghers under the command of such officers.

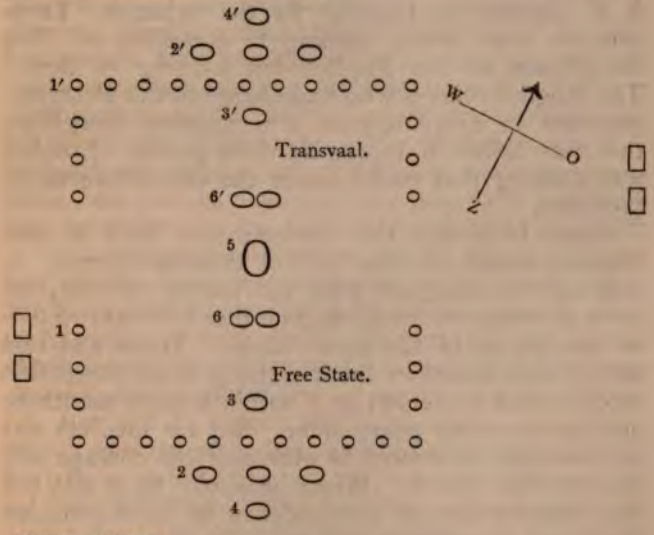
Together with President Steyn I set out for Vereeniging. On the way thither he became gradually weaker, and when on the 14th of May we arrived at Klerksdorp he could no longer dismount from his spider without assistance. He could no longer walk without leaning on someone for support.

We went into the train immediately on our arrival at Klerksdorp, and the journey began that same evening. The following morning we reached Vereeniging. A thick mist covered the ground, and it was cold. There was therefore nothing in Nature

to cheer one, or to give a good omen for the great work that lay before the Representatives of the People.

We were immediately conducted to the camp[1] that had been prepared for the Delegates, and we found that almost all the Representatives of both the States had already arrived there. How pleasant it was to meet friends and acquaintances from all parts. They had much to relate about what had occurred since we had spoken to each other last, and we could also

[1] Here is a sketch of the camp—



Orange Free State.	Trans-vaal.	
1	1′	Tents of Delegates.
2	2′	Tents of members of Government.
3	3′	Dining-room of Delegates.
4	4′	Dining-room of members of Government.
5	5	Tent for the conference.
6	6′	Tents of English officers who had the duty of providing for the Delegates.

tell much about our own experiences. Although they had arrived in the camp only a little before us, they had the manner of people who knew more about things than new arrivals, and took a pardonable pleasure in instructing us as to the topography of the camp. We learned that tents had been pitched for the Free State Representatives in the south-east portion of the camp, and for those of the Transvaal in the north-west. In the middle between the two "States" there was a large tent, where the meetings were to be held.

Everything was arranged with the object of making it as pleasant as possible for the deputies. There was, we soon found, nothing to complain of. The friendliness of the English left nothing to desire. The English officers who had charge of the Delegates attended to every request and granted everything that was asked, if it was in their power. Nothing was wanting that could, under the circumstances, be provided.

After breakfast, the Governments held a preliminary meeting in the tent of President Steyn. It may well be imagined what the feelings of everyone were at seeing the rapid decline that had taken place in the health of the great leader. There was this strong man, seized in the iron grasp of an inexorable malady, and it seemed as if within a short month he had grown many years older. But his intellect was as clear and as strong as ever, and his courage still greater than before. When he spoke there was not the slightest sign of despondency in his words, and his strong personality still, as in his best days, commanded respect. But his body—his body had been stricken; and while the unconquerable spirit was willing, the poor instrument of flesh and blood was unable to accomplish.

Words of heartfelt sympathy were spoken, or a silent pressure of the hand was given. The Govern-

ments had met to make some preliminary arrangements before the Delegates should meet. First a decision was taken as to the oath which the deputies should take; and then the commission which the Delegates had received from the People was discussed. It appeared that at the meetings held by General L. Botha and most of the Transvaal officers, and at those held in the Orange Free State by Judge Hertzog, the Delegates had been fully empowered to act on behalf of the People according to circumstances, and even to come to a final decision. On the other hand, at the meetings held by General de Wet in the Free State and by General de la Rey in the South African Republic, the People had given to their Delegates a fixed and limited authority, whatever else might be decided, in no case to relinquish the independence of the States. The question was now raised, whether representatives with such conflicting commissions could be lawfully constituted an asssembly, and the assembly to pass resolutions as to matters treating of a final decision. The discussion of this question threatened to take up too much time, and the Governments resolved to leave this point to the decision of the Delegates themselves.

At eleven o'clock there assembled in the large tent the following Representatives of the People, who took the oath and signed it:—

For the South African Republic.

1. H. A. Alberts, General, Heidelberg.
2. J. J. Alberts, Commandant, Standerton and Wakkerstroom.
3. J. F. de Beer, Commandant, Bloemhof.
4. C. F. Beyers, Assistant Commandant-General, Waterberg.
5. C. Birkenstock, burgher, Vryheid.
6. H. J. Bosman, Landdrost, Wakkerstroom.
7. Chris Botha, Assistant Commandant-General, Swazieland, State Artillery.
8. B. H. Breytenbach, Field-Cornet, Utrecht.
9. C. J. Brits, General, Standerton.
10. J. G. Cilliers, General, Lichtenburg.

11. J. DE CLERCQ, Assistant Commandant, burgher, Middelburg.
12. T. A. DÖNGES, Field-Cornet, of the town of Heidelberg and bodyguard to the Government.
13. H. S. GROBLER, Commandant, Bethal.
14. J. L. GROBLER, burgher, Carolina.
15. J. N. H. GROBLER, General, Ermelo.
16. B. T. J. VAN HEERDEN, Field-Cornet, Rustenburg.
17. J. F. JORDAAN, Commandant, Vryheid.
18. J. KEMP, General, Krugersdorp.
19. P. J. LIEBENBERG, General, Potchefstroom.
20. C. H. MULLER, General, Boksburg.
21. J. F. NAUDÉ, burgher of Pretoria, with flying commando of General Kemp.
22. D. J. E. OPPERMAN, Field-Cornet, Pretoria South.
23. B. J. ROOS, Field-Cornet, Piet-Retief.
24. P. D. ROUX, Field-Cornet, Marico.
25. D. J. SCHOEMAN, Commandant, Lydenburg.
26. F. C. STOFFBERG, Acting Landdrost, Zoutpansberg.
27. S. P. DU TOIT, General, Wolmeranstad.
28. P. L. UYS, Commandant, Pretoria North.
29. P. R. VILJOEN, burgher, Heidelberg.
30. M. J. VILJOEN, Commandant, Witwatersrand.

FOR THE ORANGE FREE STATE.

1. C. C. F. BADENHORST, Assistant Chief-Commandant, Boshof and Hoopstad, western portion of Bloemfontein, Winburg, and Kroonstad.
2. A. J. BESTER, Commandant, Bethlehem.
3. A. J. BESTER, Commandant, Bloemfontein.
4. L. P. H. BOTHA, Commandant, Harrismith.
5. G. A. BRAND, Assistant Chief-Commandant, Bethulie, Caledon River, Rouxville, Wepener, and eastern portion of Bloemfontein.
6. H. J. BRUWER, Commandant, Bethlehem.
7. D. H. VAN COLLER, Commandant, Heilbron.
8. F. R. CRONJE, Commandant, Winburg.
9. D. F. H. FLEMMING, Commandant, Hoopstad.
10. C. C. FRONEMAN, Assistant Chief-Commandant, Winburg and Ladybrand.
11. F. J. W. J. HATTINGH, Assistant Chief-Commandant, eastern part of Kroonstad and Heilbron.
12. J. A. M. HERTZOG, Commandant, Philippolis.
13. J. N. JACOBS, Commandant, Boshof.
14. F. P. JACOBSZ, Commandant, Harrismith.
15. A. J. DE KOCK, Commandant, Vrede.
16. J. J. KOEN, Commandant, Ladybrand.
17. H. J. KRITZINGEN, Field-Cornet, Kroonstad.
18. F. E. MENTZ, Commandant, Heilbron.
19. J. A. P. VAN DER MERVE, Commandant, Heilbron.

20. C. A. VAN NIEKERK, Commandant, Kroonstad.
21. H. VAN NIEKEK, Commandant of bodyguard to President Steyn.
22. J. J. VAN NIEKERK, Commandant, Ficksburg.
23. J. K. NIEUWOUDT, Assistant Chief-Commandant, Philippolis, Fauresmith, Jacobsdal, and a portion of Bloemfontein.
24. H. P. J. PRETORIUS, Commandant, Jacobsdal.
25. A. M. PRINSLOO, Assistant Chief-Commandant, Bethlehem and Ficksburg.
26. L. J. RAUTENBACH, Commandant, Bethlehem.
27. F. J. RHEEDER, Commandant, Rouxville.
28. A. ROSS, Commandant, Vrede.
29. P. W. DE VOS, Commandant, Kroonstad.
30. W. J. WESSELS, Assistant Chief-Commandant, Harrismith and Vrede.

The Representatives chose General C. F. Beyers as chairman; and as secretaries, Mr. D. E. van Velden, Minute-keeper of the Government of the South African Republic, and the Rev. J. D. Kestell, Acting Secretary of the Executive Council of the Orange Free State.

The chairman asked the Rev. J. D. Kestell to open the proceedings with prayer, and then Acting President S. W. Burger declared the meeting to be legally constituted. Thereupon the meeting was adjourned.

In the afternoon the Delegates met at three o'clock. Before beginning the discussion of the important subjects, the chairman said it would be well if the Acting President of the South African Republic were first to address some words of explanation to serve as a guide to the meeting.

Acting President Burger then addressed the meeting, and explained, as already stated earlier in this book, that it was the correspondence between Holland and England that had brought about, first a meeting between both the Governments at Klerksdorp, and subsequently a meeting with Lord Kitchener and Lord Milner at Pretoria. The presence of the Delegates at Vereeniging at that moment had resulted from the fact, that when it appeared that the British

Government insisted on the surrender of Independence the two Governments had declared that it was beyond their power constitutionally to enter into discussions on that point; of that the People alone could treat. Thereupon both Governments had made arrangements with Lord Kitchener to proceed to the People and hear what they desired. The People had elected representatives, and these were now assembled at Vereeniging to inform the Governments what the will of the People was. President Burger then proceeded to state that the English Government would not entertain the idea of Independence for the two Republics, and that the Delegates there present should bear this in mind; they would have to give information as to the condition of the country, and to decide whether, bearing that condition in mind, the struggle could still be continued Whether the destruction of the entire nation would not be the result of continuing the war, and whether it would be right to do this. He then referred to the question which had arisen as to the qualification of the members to sit together in conference and to decide upon questions, seeing that some Delegates had received full powers to act, whilst others had only a limited commission, which bound them to a certain course of action. He trusted, however, that this would place no insurmountable obstacle in the way. Finally he expressed the hope that they would bear with one another, and warned the members against divided counsels.

Thereupon the chairman asked General L. Botha to address the meeting. The General replied that he did not see his way to doing this, since the question as to the powers of the Delegates was not yet clear to him. It was then that Judge J. B. M. Hertzog explained that a Representative of the People, from a legal point of view, could not be regarded as a mere agent or mouthpiece of his constituents; but

that he, in matters of a public nature, held a general power with the right of acting according to his convictions, whatever might be the special injunction that had been laid upon him by the constituents. General J. C. Smuts, State-Attorney of the South African Republic, was of the same opinion.

This satisfied the Commandant-General, and he commenced with a general statement as to the condition of his commandos. General de Wet and also General de la Rey addressed the meeting. They stated, however, that they were purposely brief, because the making of formal reports should be left to the Delegates themselves.

The Representatives then addressed the meeting, and the first and a part of the second day were spent in the hearing of reports. The Delegates spoke till late at night, for they desired not to lose any time. From the reports of the members of the meeting it was evident that the condition of the country was miserable. There were no less than fourteen districts of the Transvaal that had become so exhausted that the commandos would no longer be able to continue in them. Food had become exceedingly scarce everywhere, and in some parts the burghers were dependent solely on the Kaffirs for their supplies. Everywhere the "horse sickness" was causing great uneasiness, and the number of those who had to go on foot was daily increasing. Special reference was made to the distress caused by the sad fate of the women, who were still found in greater and smaller numbers in different parts of the two States. They often suffered great want, and were constantly exposed to dangers at times when their husbands could afford them no assistance.

In the Orange Free State matters were somewhat more favourable.

It was true that some portions of this country were exhausted; but in general the Delegates from there

thought that the war could still be continued for six months or a year. Still, there were some who related sad facts and who were not silent as to the sufferings of the women in that Republic. On the second morning this resolution was adopted :—

"That the Governments be requested through Lord Kitchener, to thank His Majesty the King of England and Her Majesty the Queen of Holland for their interposition in connection with the bringing about of peace negotiations, as appears from the correspondence between the said Governments, and to express their regret that His Majesty's Government had not adopted the suggestion of Her Majesty's Government, to give our Delegates in Europe, who still possess our fullest confidence, the opportunity of coming to the Republics, and also that Lord Kitchener has refused to accede to a similar request made by our Governments."

After this resolution had been adopted by the meeting, almost all the Delegates had given their reports on the condition of both States. The chairman then caused the letter, together with its annexures, which had been addressed by the Governments from Pretoria to the burghers in the veld, to be read. After that it became the duty of the Delegates to consider what was to be done.

In the letter sent by the Governments at Pretoria to the burghers it was stated that the British Government still adhered to the same proposals that they had made to General L. Botha at Middelburg on the 7th of March 1901. The British Government demanded that a general surrender should first take place, and if that were done they would grant the Boers certain privileges, and as soon as possible Self-Government.

The question now before the meeting was, whether the Representatives would accept this proposal of England, or—reject it and continue the war?

It was immediately evident that the meeting was,

to express myself so, divided into two camps: the one forced to the conviction, that it was no longer possible to resist the inevitable; the other holding that the end had not yet come, and that, if England would negotiate upon no other basis than that which insisted upon the surrender of Independence, the war ought to be continued.

The Free State Delegates, with the exception of two or three, were with one accord of the latter opinion, whilst the majority of the whole assembly were convinced of the opposite. Among the Transvaalers there were some who had come to the meeting with the motto, "Independence, or else fight on!" But these, with the exception of six, came to the conclusion during the discussion that it was their duty for the sake of others to modify their views.

The reasons for ending the struggle, which were given by those Delegates who now declared that it could no longer be proceeded with, were more particularly the following:—

The country was, as already briefly indicated above, so devastated and exhausted by the burning and destruction of farms and villages, the removal of all cattle and sheep, the ruthless slaying of sheep, and destruction of grain of all sorts, that we were standing upon the threshold of a famine. It was further pointed out that horses were becoming more and more scarce, and what would the burghers signify without horses?

But it was the condition of the women, above all, that went to their hearts. The condition of the women was most pitiable. They were almost naked and suffered from hunger. They were exposed to dangers just at the times when the men had to retire before overwhelming odds, and thus had no protection just when they stood most in need of it. It was also shown that the commandos were becoming weaker and weaker, and that if in the future matters

took the same course as in the past, nothing remained for us but certain destruction. Acting President Burger and Commandant-General Botha spoke in this strain. The former warned the leaders that they should not continue the war merely for the sake of their own honour, and that they had no right to sacrifice a nation to their own ambition. The latter said that he was not thinking of himself, when he declared that they could not continue the struggle. He himself could still go on, for his family was provided for. He had horses too; he wanted nothing. Besides, it was his earnest desire to continue the war. But he dared not think of himself only. Constantly the question arose in his mind, what would become of the People? and without intermission, a voice spoke within him that it was his duty now, whilst it was yet possible, to do the best he could for his People. He also referred to the fact that it had been repeatedly declared that we should continue to the "bitter end." He would ask *where* that bitter end was? Would it be reached when the last man lay in his grave or had been banished, or had it been reached when the nation had striven until it could do so no longer? General de la Rey, too, spoke in the same spirit. He could still continue, he declared. His commandos were still able to continue the struggle, but this many others could not do—and if all could not do it, then a portion could not. From all that he had heard at the meeting he had come to the mournful conclusion that the war should be discontinued. He also referred to what had been said as to enduring to the end. "Fight to the bitter end?" he asked, addressing the meeting, —"do you say that? *But has the bitter end not come?* Each one of you must decide that question for himself."

With regard to the expectations we had of the Cape Colony, these evaporated when General Smuts said that there was no possibility in the Cape Colony

of a general revolt. He declared that everything possible had been done there. The Colonists could not have done more than they had done, but a general rising was, for various reasons, impossible. If, therefore, a reason for continuing the struggle in the Republics themselves did not exist any longer, it would be idle to go and seek it in the Cape Colony.

The Delegates on the other side did not deny that the condition of things was appalling, and that there was great distress everywhere; that especially the sufferings of the women were so great that one could not think of it without danger of becoming weak and despondent, and that there were large portions of the country that had become entirely exhausted. But it was argued that this was also the case, or at least had been said to be the case, a year ago, when General Smuts, the State-Attorney, had in his telegram to our Deputation in Europe described the condition of the country as being most dreadful. Then also it had been said by many that through want of ammunition, and of other things absolutely necessary for the continuance of the war, we could fight no longer; and yet the struggle had been continued after that for twelve months.

With respect to what had been said concerning the districts which would have to be abandoned, it was urged that in the Free State there were portions which had been entirely destroyed and consequently abandoned; but these had nevertheless later on been again inhabited and supplied with cattle. And then it was asked, whether the war had not been begun in faith, and whether it could not be carried through in the same faith?

General de Wet spoke in this strain. He pointed with earnestness to the fact that times of depression had been surmounted in the past, and that they should be surmounted again. If there were those who could not provide for themselves, then it was the duty of

the meeting to do so for them, and to continue the war.

Referring to the charge made by some, that those who wished to continue the war did not take facts into consideration, he said that he had nothing to do with facts, it was a war of faith; he had to concern himself with *a fact only when he had to clear it out of the way.*

And yet, it was these facts that were constantly being pointed at. They were declared to be insurmountable. Many advised those who wished to continue the war, to consult not only their hearts but their common sense, and if they did this they would see what God's purpose with us in this war was. One Delegate said that the war had been commenced with prayer and with the Mauser, and, he asked, what had been God's answer to this prayer? "Can you not see," he continued, "that the hand of God is stretched out against us?"

The Middleburg proposals then were before the meeting. The question now was, what the meeting was going to do in regard to those proposals? It was soon evident that the Delegates were not prepared to accept them, and were of opinion that before deciding another endeavour should be made to see whether the British Government was not inclined to conclude peace upon some other basis, a basis which would not exclude the Independence of the two States. It had, however, become plain to all that, as matters then stood, the People could not expect to have the same measure of Independence which they had enjoyed before the war, and the Delegates felt that they would have to concede and surrender much. The State-Secretary, Mr. F. W. Reitz, had suggested what might be surrendered. We could, he said, agree to the surrender of a portion of our territory—the goldfields and Zwasieland, for instance. We could relinquish our foreign policy. We could even agree

to an English protectorate. There were those who were opposed to this idea, yet it seemed that Mr. Reitz's view was in accordance with the sentiments of the meeting, and several members expressed themselves to the same effect.

I have now briefly summed up, and arranged in order, what was discussed by the Representatives of the People at Vereeniging. I have now in this chapter only to add that on the third day of the meeting, on Saturday, 17th May, two resolutions were adopted. The first empowered both Governments to conclude peace on this basis:—

The retention of a limited Independence, with the power to offer, over and above what had already been offered, by both Governments in their negotiations of 15th April 1902—

1. The relinquishment of foreign relations and embassies.
2. The acceptance of the protectorate of Great Britain.
3. The surrender of a portion of the territory of the South African Republic.
4. The conclusion of a defensive treaty with Great Britain with regard to South Africa.

The second proposal authorised the Governments to appoint a commission to negotiate with Lord Kitchener on any subject that might lead to a satisfactory peace, and to submit, through the Governments, the result of their labours to the meeting for ratification.

Shortly after these two resolutions had been agreed to the meeting was closed with prayer, and adjourned until the report of the commission was handed in.

Immediately after the close of the meeting the Governments met in the tents of President Steyn, who had been too weak to be present except at two of the sessions, and they nominated the Generals L. Botha,

C. R. de Wet, J. H. de la Rey, J. C. Smuts, and Judge J. B. M. Hertzog as the commission to negotiate at Pretoria. The following day a service was held in the large tent, and those present were addressed on the striking words of Paul: "I am not speaking falsely, and my conscience, enlightened by the Holy Spirit, bears me out when I say that I am greatly pained, and that my heart is never free from sorrow. I could wish that I were accursed, and severed from the Christ, for the sake of my brothers —my own countrymen" (Rom. ix. 1–3).—*The Twentieth Century New Testament.*

In alluding to this divine service, I may also note that every morning a prayer-meeting, and every evening a short service, was held during the whole time that the Representatives of the People were at Vereeniging; and thus the People remained faithful to the last to that spirit which since and before the days of Sarel Celliers had inspired the Africander nation. The God of their fathers was not forgotten. Their posterity also said of that Lord, "God is our refuge and our strength." In the afternoon the Governments received a reply from Lord Kitchener and Lord Milner that the request of the Delegates for a conference was acceded to, and that the commission could come to Pretoria.

The commission left about sunset, and arrived at Pretoria at about nine o'clock.

CHAPTER IV

SWIMMING AGAINST THE STREAM

ON Monday morning, the 19th of May 1902, the commission met early, and wrote a letter, intended to be read to Lord Kitchener and Lord Milner, in which the desire of the Representatives of the People was explained. As the committee was empowered to negotiate with the British Government as to any subject that might lead to peace, they also now discussed the question, what, in case the desire of the Delegates were not acceded to, the terms should be on which peace could be concluded. The following points were thereupon taken down :—

1. A date to be fixed for the establishment of responsible government.

2. All burghers of both Republics to retain the franchise, and this right to vote to be further regulated on the basis of the existing franchise law of the Cape Colony. And the electoral divisions to be fixed more or less in accordance with the number of electors.

3. All families and prisoners to be brought back to their dwellings, as soon as arrangement could possibly be made for their conveyance, as indicated in Lord Kitchener's letter of the 7th of March 1901.

4. Both the Dutch and English languages to have the same rights.

5. Payment to be made
   (*a*) Of Government notes of the South African Republic issued during the war.
   (*b*) Of all receipts given according to the custom of the Republics, for goods, etc., requisitioned for the use of the commandos.
   (*c*) Of all direct damage caused to burghers in connection with military operations.

6. The legal status of coloured persons to be the same as in the Cape Colony, and no right to vote to be given to them before responsible government shall have been introduced here under the laws to be adopted by the future Parliaments. All native tribes within and on the borders of both Republics to be disarmed immediately after the conclusion of peace.

7. Amnesty to be granted for all acts done in connection with the war by burghers of both Republics and of the Colonies, and no accounts to be demanded from officers of State monies spent during the war for military purposes.

8. Cessation of hostilities to be arranged with the chief officers.

At ten o'clock the commission was invited to the dwelling of Lord Kitchener. Immediately on their arrival in the hall, where both Governments had a month previously negotiated with the British Government, Lord Kitchener and Lord Milner made their appearance, and seats were taken at the table.

General L. Botha began by saying that, although the negotiations had lasted longer than had been expected, he could give the assurance that the burghers were acting in good faith, and that everything was done with the earnest desire to bring about peace.

Thereupon the Representatives of the British Government inquired what the proposals of the

Delegates at Vereeniging were, and the letter prepared by the commission was read as follows:—

TO THEIR EXCELLENCIES LORD KITCHENER AND LORD MILNER, PRETORIA.

"PRETORIA, *19th May* 1902.

"YOUR EXCELLENCIES,—With the object of finally putting an end to the existing hostilities, we have the honour, by virtue of the authority granted us by the Governments of both Republics, to propose the following points as a basis of negotiations over and above the points already offered in the negotiations of April last:—

"(*a*) We are prepared to relinquish our independence as regards foreign relationships.

"(*b*) We wish to retain internal self-government under a British protectorate.

"(*c*) We are prepared to surrender a portion of our territory.

"If your Excellencies are prepared to negotiate upon this basis, the above-named points can be further discussed in detail.

"We have the honour to be, your Excellencies' obedient servants,

"LOUIS BOTHA.
"C. R. DE WET.
"J. H. DE LA REY.
"J. B. M. HERTZOG.
"J. C. SMUTS."

In this letter, then, the commission laid before the British Government the wish of the Delegates. How little, indeed, it was that the People desired!—a Limited Independence! They wished to retain their own flag, and were prepared to make, besides what they had already given in blood and treasure, other sacrifices for it, and that by agreeing thenceforth to

signify nothing in the outside world, surrendering all relations with other powers; also, even in regard to their internal government, to have their wings clipped by submitting to the protectorate of England, and to become yet smaller than they were by surrendering a portion of their already small territory.

All that they wished for was to be independent, even if it were only partly so.

It was in vain!

First Lord Kitchener then Lord Milner said that the difference between what the People desired and what the British Government had proposed was too great; and when the commission replied that there was no distinction in principle, that they would actually be independent no longer if England agreed to the little that was asked, they were curtly answered that it could not be. The States had completely to surrender their independent existence!

And thereupon the Representatives of the British Government refused to discuss the proposal any further. They refused even to telegraph it to England, declaring that they were certain it would not be agreed to there, and that it might injure the cause of the Boers.

What was the commission now to do? Return to the Delegates and inform them that England would not grant what they desired? No! they had authority to negotiate on *any* subject that would lead to the desired peace, and they would now negotiate further, and see what England's intention was. They therefore asked what terms England was prepared to give in case the States surrendered.

In the afternoon the following preamble was read as an answer to this question:—

"The undersigned leaders of the burgher forces in the field, accepting on their own behalf and that of the said burghers the annexation proclaimed by Lord

Roberts, and dated respectively on the 24th May in the year of our Lord Nineteen Hundred, and No. 15 dated on the first day of September in the year of our Lord Nineteen Hundred, and accepting as a consequence thereof their status as British subjects, agree immediately to lay down their arms, surrendering all cannon, guns, and munitions of war in their possession, or under their control, and to cease from all further opposition against the authority of H.M. King Edward VII., or his successors. They do this, relying on the assurance of H.M. Government that they and the burghers surrendering together with them shall not be deprived of their personal liberty or of their property, and that the future actions of H.M. Government with regard to the consequences of the war shall be consistent with the declaration hereunder set forth. It is clearly understood that all burghers who are now prisoners-of-war, in order to share in the enjoyment of said assurance, shall declare their acceptance of the status of British subjects."

"Must we understand," asked General L. Botha, when Lord Milner had read this document,—"must we understand that our proposal is rejected entirely?"

Both Lord Kitchener and Lord Milner replied, "Yes!"

It was plain to everyone in that room who heard that answer, that we were regarded as having been conquered—completely conquered.

It was now indicated that something in the spirit of the Middleburg proposal would follow upon the preamble that had been read there, and that the exact contents and form of it would have to be agreed upon. The commission began by taking exception to the preamble, as well as to the proposal itself, and explained their objections.

No progress could be made.

After much had been said on both sides the Representatives of the British Government proposed that a sub-committee of the commission should be elected to draw up a document, together with Lord Milner, which should, if possible, be acceptable. It was then agreed that General Smuts and Judge Hertzog should act as such a sub-committee, to draft a proposal in co-operation with Lord Milner, advised by Sir Richard Solomon.

The two men who constituted the sub-committee did much. They opposed all endeavours to make the oath of allegiance obligatory. They succeeded in arranging that no judicial steps, either civil or criminal, should be taken for acts done during the war. They insisted that the Governments of both States, if a treaty of peace were made, should sign it as the Governments respectively of the South African Republic and of the Orange Free State, and thus virtually forced the British Government to treat the "annexations" of the two Republics as non-existent, and to negotiate not with late Republics, but with existing States, whose official names, and not the new names given in the annexation proclamation, it would recognise through the signatures of its Representatives.

The sub-committee also championed the cause of the colonists who had fought on our side, and although Lord Milner positively objected to any interference with what he called a matter between the Colonial Government and their own subjects, the members of the sub-committee nevertheless indirectly received the assurance that the colonists would be treated as leniently as possible.

After the sub-committee had, together with Lord Milner, drawn up the document, it was laid before the two parties. A clause was still wanting which should provide for the payment of receipts which officers in the field had given for provisions bought

for the use of the commandos during the war, and in the document no sum of money was named that should be paid to the burghers as compensation for damages.

The necessity of paying these receipts was discussed, and it was sad to hear the haggling that went on in regard to this matter. Lord Milner said it could not be expected that the British Government should pay the war costs of both sides; to which it was replied that these receipts were a lawful debt of the country, and that if England took possession of the assets of the country, worth millions of money, she should also be responsible for the debts. It was also pointed out that there were many men who possessed nothing but receipts, and if they were to lose these also, then they would possess nothing whatever.

Eventually it was agreed that in the draft proposal a clause should be added providing for the payment of the receipts, and that it should be proposed that the sum of £3,000,000 should be given for the payment of these and of the government notes.

The commission also wished to have an article providing for the protection of those who had debts to pay. They pointed out that if these people were forced to pay immediately after the war, they, having lost all, would not be able to do so, and would therefore be ruined utterly. The commission desired that no creditor should have the right to take steps against his debtor till after the lapse of a certain period. This matter was regarded by Lord Kitchener and Lord Milner as being one connected with a legal question of so intricate a nature that they did not consider it desirable to have it mentioned in the document itself. But they promised to bring it to the notice of the British Government and to recommend it to their earnest consideration.

The draft proposal was then concluded, and

telegraphed to England in the afternoon (21st of May). For a whole week we had to wait before a final answer was received from England, for meanwhile telegrams were being sent backwards and forwards. At last, on the 28th of May, the answer came, stating that the draft proposal was accepted with certain modifications, and that the proposal as now amended could no longer be altered. It was to be laid before the Representatives of the People at Vereeniging, who were to give a "yes" or "no" vote on it. The following is the proposal in its final form:—

"General Lord Kitchener of Khartoum, Commander-in-Chief, and His Excellency Lord Milner, High Commissioner, on behalf of the British Government, and Messrs. S. W. Burger, F. W. Reitz, Louis Botha, J. H. de la Rey, L. J. Meyer, and J. C. Krogh, acting as the Government of the South African Republic, and Messrs. M. T. Steyn, W. J. C. Brebner, C. R. de Wet, J. B. M. Hertzog, and C. H. Olivier, acting as the Government of the Orange Free State, on behalf of their respective burghers, desirous to terminate the present hostilities, agree on the following articles:—

"1. The burgher forces in the field will forthwith lay down their arms, handing over all guns, rifles, and munitions of war, in their possession or under their control, and desist from any further resistance to the authority of His Majesty King Edward VII., whom they recognise as their lawful sovereign. The manner and details of this surrender will be arranged between Lord Kitchener and Commandant-General Botha, Assistant Commandant-General de la Rey, and Chief-Commandant de Wet.

"2. Burghers in the field outside the limits of the Transvaal and Orange River Colony, and all prisoners-of-war at present outside South Africa,

who are burghers, will, on duly declaring their acceptance of the position of subjects of His Majesty King Edward VII., be gradually brought back to their homes as soon as transport can be provided and their means of subsistence ensured.

"3. The burghers so surrendering or so returning will not be deprived of their personal liberty or their property.

"4. No proceedings, civil or criminal, will be taken against any of the burghers so surrendering or so returning for any acts in connection with the prosecution of the war. The benefit of this clause will not extend to certain acts contrary to the usages of war which have been notified by the Commander-in-Chief to the Boer Generals, and which shall be tried by court-martial immediately after the close of hostilities.

"5. The Dutch language will be taught in public schools in the Transvaal and the Orange River Colony where the parents of the children desire it, and will be allowed in courts of law when necessary for the better and more effectual administration of justice.

"6. The possession of rifles will be allowed in the Transvaal and Orange River Colony to persons requiring them for their protection, on taking out a licence according to law.

"7. Military administration in the Transvaal and Orange River Colony will at the earliest possible date be succeeded by civil government, and, as soon as circumstances permit, representative institutions, leading up to self-government, will be introduced.

"8. The question of granting the franchise to natives will not be decided until after the introduction of self-government.

"9. No special tax will be imposed on landed property in the Transvaal and Orange River Colony to defray the expenses of the war.

"10. As soon as conditions permit, a commission, on which the local inhabitants will be represented, will be appointed in each district of the Transvaal and Orange River Colony, under the presidency of a magistrate or other official, for the purpose of assisting the restoration of the people to their homes and supplying those who, owing to war losses, are unable to provide for themselves, with food, shelter, and the necessary amount of seed, stock, implements, etc., indispensable to the resumption of their normal occupations. His Majesty's Government will place at the disposal of these commissions a sum of three million pounds sterling for the above purposes, and will allow all notes issued under Law No. 1 of 1900 of the Government of the South African Republic, and all receipts given by the officers in the field of the late Republics, or under their orders, to be presented to a judicial commission, which will be appointed by the Government; and if such notes and receipts are found by this commission to have been duly issued in return for valuable consideration, they will be received by the first-named commissions as evidence of war losses suffered by the persons to whom they were originally given. In addition to the above-named free grant of three million pounds, His Majesty's Government will be prepared to make advances as loans for the same purposes, free of interest for two years, and afterwards repayable over a period of years with 3 per cent. interest. No foreigner or rebel will be entitled to the benefit of this clause."

There, then, lay the proposal. Nothing could be added to it; nothing could be taken from it. The Delegates at Vereeniging would have to adopt it as it was, or reject it.

With regard to the colonists who had fought on the side of the Republics against their own Govern-

ment, a document was read in which it was stated that the Cape Government had resolved that the "rank and file," if they surrendered, would have to sign a document before a resident magistrate, acknowledging themselves to have been guilty of high treason, and that their punishment would be the loss of the franchise for life ; and that persons who had occupied positions under the Cape Government, or who had been officers of commandos, would have to submit to trial on the charge of high treason, on the understanding, however, that in no case would the penalty of death be inflicted. The Natal Government, always small, never large-hearted, was of opinion that the colonists who had risen should be treated in accordance with the laws of the colony (Natal).

The task of the five men was completed. They had done everything in their power to carry out the wishes of the Delegates, but they had not been able to succeed. They had been swimming against a stream that was too strong for them.

CHAPTER V

THE BITTER END

THAT same evening, the 28th of May, the commission returned to Vereeniging, and the following morning a meeting of both Governments was held in the tent of President Steyn to hear the report of the five men. The commission read the following letter:—

TO THE HONOURABLE GOVERNMENTS OF THE ORANGE FREE STATE AND THE SOUTH AFRICAN REPUBLIC.

"PRETORIA, *28th May* 1902.

"HONOURABLE SIRS,—In accordance with our commission from both Governments to proceed to Pretoria for the purpose of negotiating with the British authorities on the question of peace, we have the honour to report as follows: The sessions lasted from Monday the 19th May till Wednesday the 28th May, and the delay was chiefly caused by the long time which had to be given to the cable correspondence with the British Government. First of all, we submitted a proposal in which we endeavoured to negotiate on the basis of a limited Independence, with the surrender of a portion of our territory. Lord Kitchener and Lord Milner positively refused to negotiate upon this basis, and informed us that if this proposal were telegraphed to the British Government it would be detrimental to the negotiations.

At the same time we were informed that, as already stated to the two Governments, the British Government was only prepared to negotiate on the basis of the Middleburg proposal, with minor modifications. In order to throw this proposal into a final shape, Lord Milner asked the assistance of some members of the commission; and this was agreed to, on the understanding that the help of these members should be given without prejudice.

"As the result of the labours of this sub-committee, Lord Milner laid on the table a draft proposal to which we insisted that the new article should be added, which was agreed to (No. 11). This draft proposal was then telegraphed to the British Government, and was by them altered into a final form, which was communicated to us. This final proposal is annexed hereunto. We were also informed on the part of the British Government that this proposal could not be further altered, but had to be either adopted or rejected as it stood by the Delegates of both Republics: at the same time we were informed, that this adoption or rejection had to take place within a fixed time. We thereupon told Lord Kitchener that this final decision would be communicated to him not later than Saturday evening next (the 31st of May).

"During the formal negotiations some informal discussions also took place regarding the British subjects in the Cape Colony and Natal, who have fought on our side. As the result of these informal discussions, a communication was made to us by the British Government, which we annex hereunto.—We have the honour to be your Honours' obedient servants,

"LOUIS BOTHA.
"J. H. DE LA REY.
"C. R. DE WET.
"J. B. M. HERTZOG.
"J. C. SMUTS."

That the Governments were greatly disappointed it is needless to say, that they did not say much may be well imagined. Still, questions were asked as to the meaning of conditions that appeared to require explanation, and these were answered by the commission to the best of their ability.

President Steyn made a few remarks, and pointed out how objectionable the proposal was. He expressed himself strongly against the acceptance of it.

General de la Rey pointed out that the Representatives of the People should have to choose one of these three ways out of the difficulty: (1) To continue the struggle; or (2) To accept the proposal of the British Government; or (3) Unconditional surrender.

Hereupon President Steyn remarked that there was still a fourth: viz. To insist upon our cause being decided in Europe by persons empowered, and sent thither by us.

"But," he added in a sad tone, "I am like one who had been wounded to death. I can no longer take part in the struggle, and have therefore perhaps no right to speak any more. To-day I must, on account of my serious illness, resign my position, and now the matter is in your hands and in those of the Representatives of the People!"

It was a hard thing to hear those words: "I am as one who has been wounded to death." Our hearts were broken at the thought that the President could not wield the sword. He had in the long and dreadful struggle lived each day on the very summit of determination and of courage. Never, not even when he saw that his bodily strength was rapidly failing, had he shown the slightest sign of discouragement.

And now he could no longer take part in the struggle. Many things in this war had weighed heavily upon us; but the fate of President Steyn broke our hearts.

Having conversed together some moments longer, the Governments proceeded to the tent of assembly, and there laid the letter of the commission before the Delegates.

It was a blow for these Representatives of the People, a blow which, though it did not come unexpectedly, was nevertheless overwhelming. It stunned them like the thunder-clap which, expected from moment to moment, at last explodes.

The clouds lowered, and their sombre shadow lay upon the meeting until the end of the discussions.

In the first place, the commission was asked for explanations regarding the various articles of the British proposal, to which "Yes" or "No" was now to be the answer. It was as if they were seeking for something in the proposal that could not be found there.

There were all sorts of conditions in it, but all were on one condition: *The Republics must surrender their Independence!*

During the adjournment in the afternoon the Free State Delegates met in the tent of General de Wet to accept there the resignation of President Steyn. They received a letter from him, in which he said that he was obliged to do this on account of his serious illness. He further stated that, according to a law which gave him that power, he had appointed General C. R. de Wet as Acting State President.

Just when the letter had been read and discussed, something happened in the tent that drew the heart of the Free Stater closer to that of the Transvaaler than before. Acting President Burger gave, on behalf of his Government to the Government of the Orange Free State, a sum of money—not so much, he said, as they would have desired—for the use of President Steyn. All were moved, and Judge Hertzog expressed the feelings of all when accepting the gift, as chairman, he said that they were deeply

touched by the thoughtfulness of the Transvaalers, and that their deed afforded a new proof of our indissoluble union.

Shortly before three o'clock horses were harnessed to the vehicle of President Steyn, and accompanied by Dr. van der Merwe he got into it. Dr. van der Merwe was now going to take him to his own house at Krugersdorp, and there to take further charge of him. And here I must not let the opportunity pass without bearing witness to the unselfishness and self-sacrifice of this doctor. Everyone appreciated what he had done for the President, and I feel assured that the Africander nation will bear it in thankful remembrance.

The President said farewell to those who loved him, and rode away. I sat writing in another tent on some business of his, and did not see him depart.

The carriage rolled away, and I had not said farewell to him. I could not let him go without a last pressure of the hand. I ran after the vehicle. The guards stopped it, and so I could reach him. I grasped the hand of the sick man. I still see him as he sat in his carriage. He looked to me like the personification of all that was noble, of all that was heroic: a man who for a great Idea could sacrifice all.

I feel the pressure of his hand yet, I still hear his words, but how he looked, and what he spoke, I may not, and what passed through my heart, I cannot set down here.

The carriage drove away.

The curtain had fallen upon a tragedy: Martinus Theunis Steyn had disappeared from the scene.

It was as if an arrow had gone through my heart.

I went to the tent of assembly. I listened to the words of the Delegates, and mechanically made notes of what was said; but my heart was elsewhere. It was with the man who had striven as few could,

and who was now being carried away by the train farther and farther from the arena.

For a considerable time longer the Delegates continued asking for explanations of the articles of the British proposal. At last nothing remained to be asked; then it was that one of the Delegates girded himself to the task of placing himself face to face with the question, "What we were to accept: whether we should continue this struggle, or whether we should accept the terms of the British Government, or whether we should surrender unconditionally."

The Delegate who spoke first said that the terms of the English were not such as had been desired, but that under the circumstances no better ones could be expected. It was his opinion that they should be accepted. This Delegate had hardly sat down when General Nieuwoudt rose and expressed it as his view that the meeting should immediately proceed to vote.

This was a bold move, intended, as everyone could see, to obtain a vote for the continuance of the struggle. And this would have happened if a vote had now been taken, for the meeting was just then in a mood to reject the English proposals, which had made a very unfavourable impression. This was well understood, and several members remarked that in such an important matter the meeting should be careful, and not act without due caution; if it did it might prove fatal. The discussions then continued, until a resolution was come to on the afternoon of the third day, Saturday, the 31st of May.

As things had gone in the beginning, so they went now. There were two parties, and the views were distinctly and clearly marked; the one side maintaining that it was the duty of the people to continue the struggle, whilst the other party held that, whatever one might wish, it was no longer possible to do so. I shall not note here all that was said, for much that had been said on the 15th, 16th, and 17th of May was

repeated. I shall now again, as I did in a former chapter, summarise and arrange.

There were some who pointed out that, however one might regard the matter, it was impossible to continue the war. As before, it was remarked that we stood on the threshold of a famine, and that it was want of food that was forcing us to discontinue the struggle. It was also stated that horses had become so scarce that almost three out of every ten burghers had to go about on foot, and that the horses which we still possessed were so weak that they were unable to do the work that was required of them, especially now that no forage was any longer obtainable and they had to subsist on grass only. It had also become undeniably evident that the commandos had grown gradually weaker. Where we lost men we could not fill up their places. Thus General de la Rey—the man who had never shown any signs of discouragement—declared that since his last great fights he had lost 300 men, dead, wounded, and prisoners, and that his cattle had been captured by 40,000 mounted troops. Commandant-General Botha also referred to the fact that the English had 31,400 of our men prisoners-of-war, that of these 600 had died, and that 3800 of our burghers had fallen in battle. He said that if the war continued in the same manner we should eventually be exhausted, and should not again have a chance to negotiate. General Smuts made it clear to the meeting that it was possible to continue the war from a military point of view for three or six months longer; but the war was not a mere *military* matter, it was a *national* matter; and he added, "Why did we fight? Merely for the sake of fighting; merely to shoot and be shot? No, it was for our Independence. Well, then, was there any chance left, humanly speaking, of retaining it?"

But what was more specially urged was the miserable plight of our women. Many of them had hardly any

clothes left, and they were in danger of dying of famine. When the commandos brought them food it was taken away by the English forces, so pitilessly that they took, as it were, the food out of the mouths of the children. So far from the truth was it that the English had removed our wives to the concentration camps from charitable motives, that during the last six months they had refused to receive them when, driven by want, they had sought refuge in the camps, and had, since the need had become most pressing, sent them back to their ruined dwellings when the women had gone to the towns for help. Moreover, every Delegate there knew well to what dangers the women were exposed, and that whenever they most required the protection of the men those men had to retire before the overwhelming numbers of the enemy, thus leaving the women behind, exposed to indescribable insults from Kaffirs and soldiers. This surely could not continue.

On the other hand, it was argued that if the proposal was accepted the nation would thereby be extinguished. It was said that if the war was continued then there was a hope of winning it; but by accepting the proposal the deathblow would be given to our national existence. The unsatisfactory nature of the terms offered by England were also dwelt upon. The arrangement offered in the proposal as to compensation for losses suffered by the war was insufficient, and the people would be reduced to the greatest poverty. It was further urged that we should not allow our courage to sink on account of the dark hour we were passing through. In the past there had also been dark days. Dark had been the days when the chief towns had been taken by the enemy, when General Prinsloo surrendered, when the railway lines fell completely into the hands of the enemy. But we put our trust in God and carried on the struggle, and no one was made ashamed. After

the sifting, those who were left had remained steadfast. The outlook had also been dark when the ammunition was spent. General de Wet said that he used to shudder when he saw a burgher coming towards him with an empty cartridge-belt. And yet later on so much was taken from the English that there was now a sufficient supply. The fact also that England was at this moment ready to negotiate was a proof that by persisting we had gained something, for there had been a time when Lord Salisbury had insisted on unconditional surrender. Another Delegate also reminded the meeting that there was a time when Lord Roberts would not meet General Botha, and now the English were negotiating with us! Why then, some Delegates asked, should this be the last chance of negotiating? Even if the proposal was now declined—this had been done before several times in the past—England would be willing to negotiate, and the chances were that at each negotiation they would obtain better terms.

So the Representatives of the People discussed the great question; but it was as if they were grasping at the last straw floating on the stormy waters of a whirlpool. We could not resist the conviction that the Africander nation was exhausted. Gradually it was becoming evident that it was impossible to continue the war. Even those who saw a chance to hold out in their own districts and with their own commandos began more and more to perceive that they could not do so if they stood alone.

This conviction acted on the minds of the Delegates, and, as General Beyers remarked, a spirit of aversion to further resistance arose. Against this spirit it was seen to be impossible to struggle. Judge Hertzog also showed that, although he wished to make no accusation against anyone, the holding of this meeting had been a great mistake, for the meeting had

taken away the last plank upon which they had stood. For at this meeting the Delegates had been obliged to declare what the true state of the country was, and those who still had courage would now, after learning to what a pass matters had come, grow disheartened. General de la Rey also pointed to this when he said, "You may say what you will, resolve what you will; but whatever you do, here in this meeting is the end of the war!" The same was said by General Smuts. "This is for us," he said, "a great moment, perhaps the last in which we shall meet as a free people and a free Government."

It was in vain that voices were still raised for continuing the struggle. In vain that one referred to posterity, and declared that future generations would blame their forefathers that they had laid down their arms when they should have continued the struggle. In vain was it shown that they had been enjoined by their constituents to continue the struggle. "Injunction or no injunction, it is you," said General de la Rey to the Delegates, "who must decide, and you will have to decide, not for your own village or for your own district, but for the whole country."

The inevitable, the hard inexorable, stared the meeting in the face. It was simply impossible any longer to struggle against the stream. It was evident that although, from a military point of view, we had not been conquered, yet the war could not, for the sake of the People, be carried on any longer. The Boers had held out as long as they could; nay, months and months longer than they really could, and now—THE BITTER END HAD COME!

But how should we surrender? Unconditionally? That was what the warrior would wish. He would have wished to receive no favour from the enemy; he would have wished to listen to no terms from his adversary. He would have wished to say to his

enemy, "I can do no more; there is my sword! Do with me now what you will!"

But this could not be. THERE WERE THE PEOPLE!

What would become of the People if their leaders, in order to gratify their own military sentiment, surrendered unconditionally? "No!" said the leaders of the People, "we cannot do this." Here it was that I learned to respect General L. Botha, and with him other Generals, more than ever before. They sacrificed themselves, at the last moment, once more for the People. Repeatedly at the meeting at Vereeniging, and previously at Klerksdorp, the interests of the People had been referred to, especially by General Botha. Repeatedly, too, the colonists who had fought along with us had been mentioned, and it had been shown that if we accepted the terms of the English, then the People would retain possession of their personal liberty, and would eventually obtain self-government; and the colonists, although deprived of the franchise, would remain free. For the sake, therefore, of the People, the chiefs sacrificed their military pride; and in order to be able to provide for their kith and kin, and to be able to some extent to heal their wounds, they said, "We shall not surrender unconditionally; we shall advise the Delegates to adopt the proposal of the enemy."

Now there were a considerable number of Delegates that still desired to continue the war. They were principally Free Staters, but there were also Transvaalers who were unwilling to give up the struggle, just as there were also some from the Free State who could no longer persist. The disposition of these was, at all events, to persist until the discussions were closed, and if it then became evident that there were so many who voted against the continuance of the struggle that it would be impossible for them to carry on the war alone, then to say, "You who are for yielding force us also to surrender. We are

driven to it." Thus, they thought, the whole world would see who the men were who, at the last gathering of the Africander nation, had endured unto the end.

To the views of these Delegates expression was given on Saturday morning, the 31st of May, by a resolution proposed by General Nieuwoudt, seconded by General Brand. That resolution proposed that the terms of the English should be rejected. Another proposal was drawn up by General Smuts, and laid before the meeting by Mr. R. R. Viljoen and General H. A. Alberts. This draft proposed that the meeting should authorise the Governments to adopt the proposal of the British Government, and fully set forth what the reasons were that forced the Delegates to do so.

There now lay the two proposals. Would the Delegates be divided? Would they part from each other in anger? Would they for all future time look back upon this, the greatest moment in the history of South Africa, with bitter reproaches against each other?

But something great occurred. Was it not God's guidance to keep the People united to the last moment? It was this: those who wished to continue the war, instead of striving after the honour of being renowned as the steadfast ones who had only been forced by the surrender of others to surrender also, ranged themselves by the side of those who could no longer continue the contest, feeling that as they had fought and suffered together, they should also fall together.

It happened in this way. General Botha and General de la Rey went to General de Wet early on the morning of the 31st of May, and pointed out to him that it had after all now become plain that they could not go on with the struggle. Why should there still be division amongst them? they asked. If they had been united in the struggle until now,

then surely it would be wrong to be divided at the last? General de Wet saw that this was so, and agreed with the other two Generals to meet his burghers separately, whilst the other two would speak to their burghers apart, with the object of arriving at unanimity.

At the meeting General de Wet suggested that in order to avoid division a commission should be appointed to draw up a third proposal that would be acceptable to both parties; and that whilst the commission was busy at this work the Free State and Transvaal Delegates should consult separately, with the object of arriving at a unanimous conclusion. The meeting approved of this, and appointed General Smuts and Judge Hertzog to carry out the resolution. Then the Free Staters went to the tent of General de Wet, while the Transvaalers remained in the tent of assembly.

I went along with the Free Staters. Never shall I forget what I witnessed there. General de Wet showed that there was no chance any longer of continuing the struggle, and said that they ought not to be divided, but if possible unanimously vote for one resolution. I see him yet, that unyielding man, with his piercing eyes, his strong mouth and chin—I see him there still, like a lion fallen into a snare. He will not, he cannot, but he must give up the struggle! I still see the stern faces of the officers who up to that moment had been so unbending. I see them staring as if into empty space. I see, engraved upon their faces something indescribable, that seemed to ask: Is this the bitter end of our sufferings and our sorrows, of our faith and of our strong crying to God?

General de la Rey had on the previous day exclaimed in the meeting, "You speak of faith. What is faith? . . . Lord, Thy will, and not mine, be done! I eliminate myself under God's will!" Then those

strong men who had led the People until that moment felt what those words implied!

How great was their emotion! I saw the lips quiver of men who had never trembled before a foe. I saw tears brimming in eyes that had been dry when they had seen their dearest laid in the grave. . . .

The men agreed to remain united!

They again assembled in the tent. The draft of General Smuts, amended by him and Judge Hertzog, was read by the latter, and ran as follows:—

"This meeting of Representatives of the People of the S.A.R. and O.F.S., held at Vereeniging from the 15th May 1902 to the 31st of May 1902, has learnt with regret of the proposal made by His Majesty's Government in regard to the cessation of existing hostilities and of the intimation that this proposal must be accepted or rejected in an unaltered form.

"The meeting regrets that His Majesty's Government has absolutely refused to negotiate with the Governments of the Republics upon the bases of our Independence, or to permit our Governments to enter into communication with our Deputation.

"Our Peoples have indeed always thought that not only on the ground of Right, but also on the ground of the great material and personal sacrifices that they have made for their Independence, they have a just claim to such Independence.

"This meeting has earnestly taken into consideration the condition of land and people, and has more especially taken into account the following facts:

"1. That the military tactics pursued by the British military authorities has led to the entire ruin of the territory of both the Republics, with burning of farms and towns, destruction of all means of subsistence, and exhaustion of all sources necessary for the support of our families, for the maintenance of our forces in the field, and for the continuation of the war.

"2. That the placing of our captured families in the concentration camps has led to an unprecedented condition of suffering and disease, so that within a comparatively short time about 20,000 of those dear to us have perished there, and the horrible prospect has arisen that by continuing of the war our entire race might be exterminated.

"3. That the Kaffir tribes within and without the borders of the territories of both Republics are almost all armed and take part in the struggle against us, and by perpetrating murders and committing all kinds of horrors, an impossible state of affairs has been brought about in many districts of both Republics, an instance of which took place lately in the district Vrijheid, where fifty-six burghers were murdered and mutilated in a shocking manner at the same time.

"4. That by proclamations of the enemy, which he has already carried into effect, the burghers still in the field are threatened with loss of all the movable and immovable property, and so with total ruin.

"5. That through the circumstances of the war it has already long ago become impossible for us to retain the many thousands of prisoners-of-war taken by our forces, and that we thus could do but comparatively little damage to the British troops, whilst our burghers captured by the British are sent abroad; and that after the war has raged for nearly three years there remains only a small portion of the forces with which we entered into the war.

"6. That this remnant still in the field, which forms but a small minority of our entire people, has to contend against overwhelming odds, and moreover has reached a condition virtually amounting to famine and want of the necessary means of subsistence—and that notwithstanding our utmost endeavours and the sacrifice of all that we value and hold dear, we cannot reasonably expect a successful issue:

"This meeting is therefore of opinion that there is no reasonable ground for thinking that by continuance of the war our People will retain the possession of its Independence, and considers that under the circumstances the People is not justified in carrying on the war any longer, as that can alone tend to bring about the social and material destruction not only of ourselves but also of our descendants.

"Urged by the above-mentioned circumstances and motives, this meeting authorises both Governments to accept the proposal of His Majesty's Government, and on behalf of the People of both Republics to sign the same.

"This meeting of Delegates expresses the confident hope that the conditions which have now been called into being by adopting the proposal of His Majesty's Government may soon be ameliorated in such a way that our nation may thereby attain the enjoyment of those privileges to which it considers that not only on account of its past, but also on the ground of its sacrifices in the course of this war, it can justly lay claim.

"This meeting has noted with satisfaction the resolution of His Majesty's Government to grant a large measure of amnesty to those British subjects who took up arms on our side, and to whom we are bound by the ties of blood and honour, and expresses the hope that it may please His Majesty to extend this amnesty still further."

With fifty-four against six votes the meeting adopted this proposal.

Clearly and fearlessly there were reasons set forth in this resolution why the Representatives of the People felt themselves obliged to give up the long struggle.

For a year past it had been impossible to continue, and yet the Africander people had with wonderful endurance continued to stand firm. Not easily had

they been induced to see that the struggle was a hopeless one, and when at last they were compelled by the overwhelming force of circumstances to give up the contest, they did not sink down paralysed to the earth, as if they no longer retained any self-respect; but they made themselves felt for the last time, by a resolution which will take rank in history as one of the great manifestos, which will be valued according to its true worth by future generations, better than we can value it to-day.

The Boers had sacrificed everything. They had seen their houses given as a prey to the flames. They had seen their property destroyed. They had seen their cattle driven away in large numbers, and their sheep done to death in heaps of tens of thousands. They had shed their blood like water. Everything, everything, they had offered up for freedom and independence. Nay, more than this had they laid on the altar. They saw that for the great cause their mothers, their wives, their daughters, their sisters, had suffered hunger, had been carried away, had died by thousands in the camps, that they had been ill-treated, insulted and slandered, and violated . . . they had drunk of the cup to its last bitter dregs.

Could they do more? It was already too much. They had made the greatest sacrifice that could be demanded, and they had made it in a materialistic age, in which gold exercises a tyrannic influence, and much that is noble is trodden down under its remorseless heel. In these times, when many believe no more in such a thing as a pure love for Liberty, a love that can lead a man to the performance of sublime deeds; in these times, when men contemn the ideal, and speak with pity of noble aspirations, as being illusions or puerilities;—in these times, a drama had been acted before the eyes of the whole world by a people that could still sacrifice all for a great and holy

ideal. Still in these times of unbelief there had been seen the heads of two States openly calling upon the name of God, and the world had seen a nation that could carry on war believing in God. And had these ideals now been rudely dragged through the mud by the bitter result? Had the faith of the People been in vain? Had that People appealed to God, and had He declared Himself against them?

Let no man say this!

God has formed the Africander nation in this great struggle. It has not been exterminated; its language has not been destroyed. The might of the enemy has overwhelmed it, has gone over it like a mighty wave, but Africander sentiment still exists. No weapon can bend that will, no violence can suppress that spirit! The Africander nation remains an indestructible element in the British Empire. Let no man say that God has not heard the prayer of the Africander nation. Many have not been able to understand the will of God, and have been overthrown by the insulting question, "Where is now your God?" but I say again, let no man assert that God has not heard the prayer of the Africander people. He who has eyes to see can see that the Africander race has been more firmly welded together by the glowing heat of this struggle, and our People will be held together chiefly by those who passed through the greatest heat of the fire—our mothers. For it was they who suffered most; it was they who made the greatest sacrifices. Words fail me when I endeavour to speak of the women and of what they had to endure. I have found them in their burnt-down dwellings, in stables, and in waggon-houses. I have endeavoured to speak words of encouragement and consolation to them when I met them in the veld, fleeing before the enemy. I have seen them almost unrecognisable, tanned by sun and wind, and seen how thinly they were often clad. I have sat with

them at their meals, in the burnt houses or on the ground in the veld, and when I thought of their scanty food it was as if the morsel in my mouth had grown too large, and I could not swallow it. And never did I hear them complain. They were ever ready to bear every burden, to make every sacrifice, if only the Independence of the People were not lost. It is they who will hold our People together.

It is because we have such mothers that we look into the future with courage, and feel that, although we now are under the British Empire, and as subjects of that Empire will bear ourselves peaceably, yet our own nationality will ever be something great and sacred to us. And we shall always consider it the greatest honour still to be known as Africanders.

Thus God has heard our prayer.

CHAPTER VI

EXIT

"HERE we stand at the grave of the two Republics," said Acting President Burger when the resolution had been taken by the meeting. There was a great silence while he spoke. "For us," he continued, "there remains much to be done, and we must devote ourselves to it. Although we can no longer do so in the official capacities we have heretofore held, let us not draw back our hands from doing what is our duty. Let us pray God to lead us, and to show us how we can keep our People together. Of the unfaithful ones also we must be mindful. We may not cast out that portion of our People; let us learn to forgive and to forget."

That evening, shortly before eleven o'clock, both the Governments were back at Pretoria. With the utmost haste they were conducted to the house of Lord Kitchener.

For a few moments they were left alone, because they wished once more to hear the resolution of the Delegates read, and assure themselves that it was correct.

When this had been done Lord Kitchener and Lord Milner entered.

The two Representatives of the British Government sat at the head of the table, alongside each other, at the south side of the hall. Next to Lord Milner, on his left hand, sat Acting President S. W. Burger,

and next followed, on that side of the table, State-Secretary F. W. Reitz, General L. Botha, General J. H. de la Rey, Mr. Krogh, and General L. J. Meyer.

Next to Lord Kitchener, on his right hand, sat Acting President C. R. de Wet, General C. H. Olivier, Judge J. B. M. Hertzog, and Acting Government Secretary W. J. C. Brebner.

The contract had been written in quadruple on parchment by a typewriter. One copy was intended for the King of England, one for Lord Kitchener, one to be preserved in the archives of Pretoria, and one in that of Bloemfontein.

Everything was as silent as death when Acting President Burger took the pen in his hand.

I looked at my watch; it was five minutes past eleven on the 31st day of May in the year Nineteen Hundred and Two.

President Burger signed. After him the other members of the Government of the South African Republic; then Acting President de Wet, and after him the other members of the Free State Government. Lord Kitchener followed, and Lord Milner signed the last of all.

President Steyn was not there. Our hearts bled at the thought that he had been seized by a dangerous malady; and yet it seemed to me as if I owed some obligation at that moment to that malady, since it was owing to it that the President of the Orange Free State was prevented from doing what would have caused him the greatest pain in the world. He had said once, "To set my hand to a paper to sign away the Independence of my People—that I shall never do." Sad circumstances, which he might then almost have called fortunate, had brought it about that he *could* not do what he *would* not do.

The document was signed!

All were silent in that room where so much had been spoken.

For a few moments longer they sat still. Then the members of the Republics, which had now ceased to be, rose up as if dazed, to retire from the hall.

Lord Kitchener passed from one to the other, and shook hands with all. "We are good friends now!" he said.

Did this give him satisfaction? Did no dart of pain, no pang of sorrow, pass through his heart at the thought that he had taken a great share in the extinction of a free people?

But he spoke as a soldier should to a brave enemy who had been forced to give up his sword; and the members of the Governments strove to take what he said in the spirit in which it was spoken. But their hearts were broken.

Then they left the hall.

EPILOGUE

DO I feel any remorse, now that all is over, because I struggled on to the end? Is there any feeling of regret in me, when I look back, that I persisted even when I sometimes thought that there was no hope—when, as at Nauwpoort in the dark last days of July 1900, and several times after, I thought that all was lost? No, nothing troubles me. On the contrary, whilst I am writing this I am experiencing an indescribable feeling of satisfaction—something that tells me, You have—very inefficiently, it is true—but yet you have endeavoured to do your duty.

I constantly felt that as long as my Government stood it was not for me to ask *why* or *wherefore*—

> "Their's not to reason why,
> Their's but to do and die."

Moreover, I deemed it a sacred privilege to be, in my capacity as a minister of God's word, with my people in the time of their greatest trouble; to bind up the broken-hearted, to encourage the despondent, to comfort the suffering—especially the much-suffering women, our heroines—to bring the word of God to them who would otherwise have been deprived of it, and to point the dying to the Cross. I heard from time to time that my work had not been without blessing, and it was always a source of joy and gratitude to me to know that there were other brothers in Christ who were also in the field; while it pained me to know that others had been prevented

by unavoidable circumstances from labouring with the small band in the field.

Once more, there is no sense of regret in my mind. I thank God that He enabled me to remain on commando until the end; and with regard to the charge flung at the heads of the leaders, that instead of leading they had misled the people, I can say this, that never, not even in the darkest hours, could I know what might happen, nor what God had destined for our people—and this, too, was always clear to me, that if every cause had been abandoned when it was apparently hopeless, then some of the most glorious victories that the world has seen would never have been won.

With the deepest gratitude to God for His protection in the many dangers of the war, I now lay down my pen.

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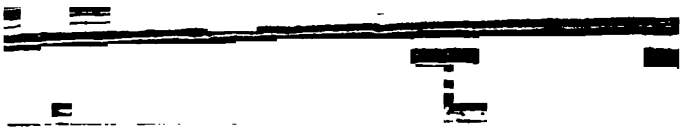

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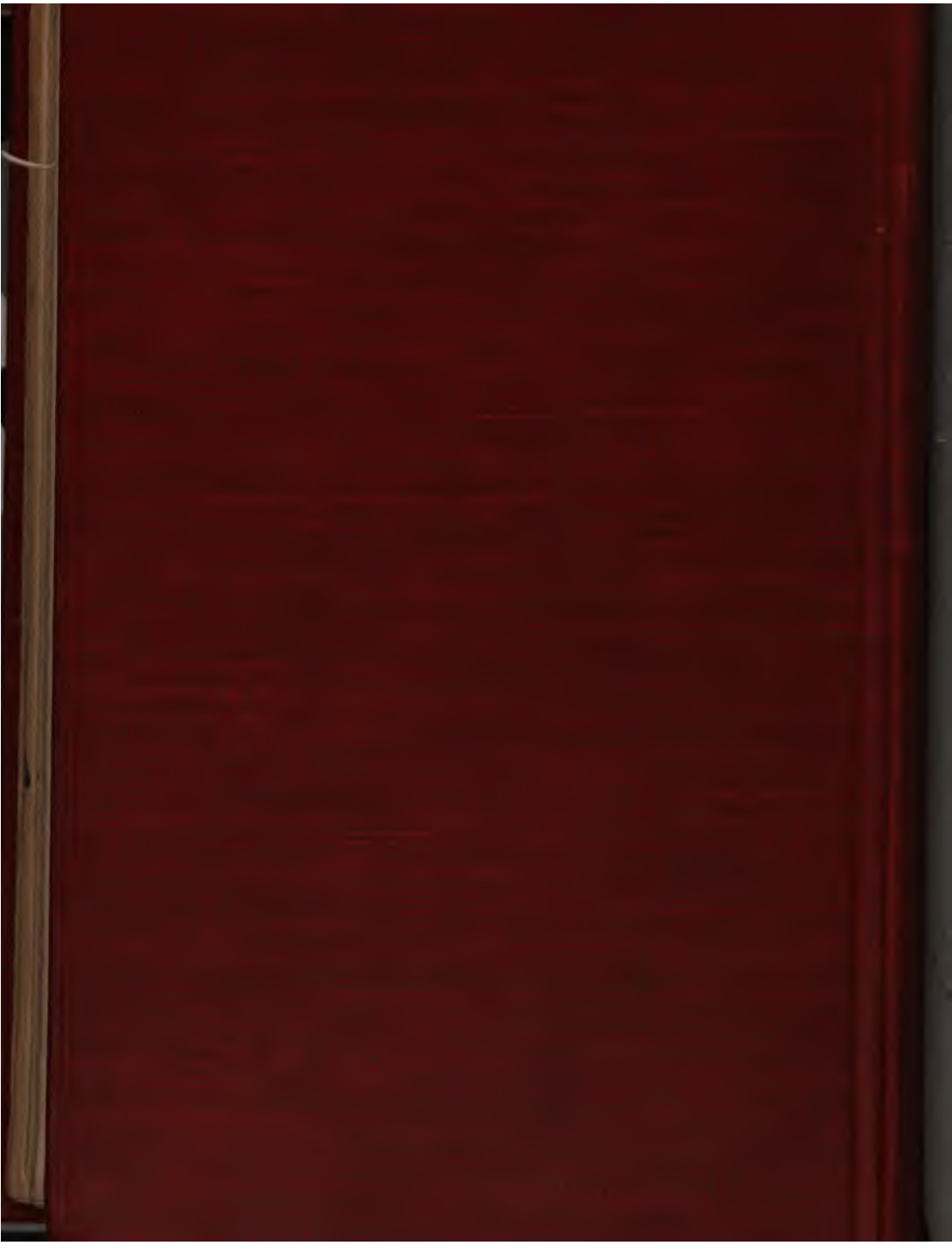
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